

# Saipan Tribune

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#### SANTA'S LITTLE HELPERS

Garapan Girls Scouts wave their hands in the air as they perform various Christmas songs during yesterday's Troop Fest 2004 at the American Memorial Park. The event, a benefit concert intended to raise funds for troops and Iraqi children, featured various artists and school groups performing at the amphitheatre.

SHAN SEMAN

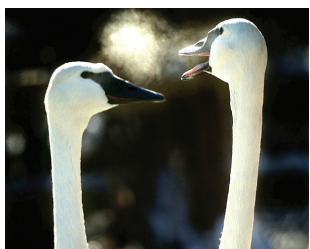
## INSIDE



#### Welcome Home

About 18 soldiers from the Echo Company, 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry were greeted with cheers and open arms Wednesday night at the Francisco C. Ada-Saipan International Airport after about four months of being away on training.

Page 2



#### Icy Blast

A winter storm battered states from the Plains through the Midwest on Wednesday, sending travelers slipping and sliding over icy roads, dumping a foot of snow over some areas and pushing temperatures to bitter-cold levels.

Page 20

# \$20M bonanza for PSS

## Babauta commits \$20M Compact money to PSS

By LIBERTY DONES  
REPORTER

Gov. Juan N. Babauta has decided to commit over \$20 million in Compact Impact funds entirely to the Public School System over the next four years beginning fiscal year 2005.

Babauta announced his decision during his meeting yesterday with the members of the Board of Education.

"I am willing to commit the entire \$5.1 million annual Compact funds to PSS in the next four years. It's our commitment to education," Babauta told education officials, led by BOE chair Roman C. Benavente and deputy education com-

missioner David Borja.

During the meeting, which was held at the Governor's Office conference room, governor senior policy advisor Bob Schwalbach said the move is actually risky but since economic trends in the Commonwealth look promising, "we're taking the risk."

"The economy is picking up. Our

revenue collection based on the first two months of fiscal year 2005 is very promising so we're confident to take the risk," he said.

He noted that huge capital improvement project spending in the last three years has actually boosted the local economy.

The Babauta administration earlier said that the CNMI spent over \$100 million in CIP funds in the last three fiscal

See \$20M on Page 12

## Passing standard for NCLEX-PN raised

By MARCONI CALINDAS  
REPORTER

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing Inc. has raised the passing standard for the NCLEX-PN® examination—the licensure examination for practical nurses—effective April 1, 2005.

This revision of the examination standards for practical nurses was approved by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Inc. in a vote held during a Nov. 29 to Dec. 1, 2004 meeting, raising the passing rate from -0.4700 to -0.4200 logits.

The committee also modified the

structure and the content distribution for NCLEX-PN® Test Plan, incorporating improvements on readability and clarity to the NCLEX-PN® Test Plan document.

Although this revision has been announced before, the question still lingers

See PASSING on Page 12

## Deposition of subpoenaed officials fizzles out

By JOHN RAVELO  
REPORTER

In an anti-climactic twist, government officials subpoenaed to appear in court yesterday in connection with

the ongoing Malite case did not take the witness stand after attorney general Pamela Brown's lawyers withdrew a request for preliminary injunction on the release of the \$3.45 million land compensation funds.

Benjamin Sachs, the Attorney General's Office's civil division chief, withdrew the request that was supposed to be heard yesterday, following Finance Secretary Fermin Atalig's withdrawal of

See DEPOSITION on Page 12

## Red Cross warns of phone prank

By MARCONI CALINDAS  
REPORTER

The local American Red Cross chapter warned the public yesterday of bogus phone calls promising help for victims of Typhoon Chaba.

"Please be warned. We are not calling people anymore for Typhoon

See RED on Page 12





Local

Troops glad to be home for holidays

By SHAN SEMAN  
REPORTER

About 18 soldiers from the Echo Company, 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry were greeted with cheers and open arms Wednesday night at the Francisco C. Ada-Saipan International Airport after about four months of being away on training.

The arrivals section of the airport was a scene of emotional reunions as families, friends, and supporters gathered to welcome loved ones.

"It's always nice to come home," said Pfc. Winfred Camacho, who arrived with three-year-old son Kobe after picking him up in Seattle, Washington. "Our training was very tough, we went through hard training which would be helpful for us in Iraq."

In addition to the 18 soldiers, other members of Company E

as well as active military members also arrived and will spend the next two weeks with family and friends.

"This is a blessing and I'm happy," Camacho said.

Winfred's father, former Department of Public Safety commissioner Edward Camacho, was on hand to welcome his son, and expressed a sigh of relief and joy at Winfred's arrival.

"Oh this is a relief, finally," he said. "We've been waiting for this moment. Every minute, we're going to be together."

"I think this is a wonderful period for them to be back for the holidays," he added. "I know they've been waiting for this and I know it's also going to be tough when they're about to leave, but what we want to do is keep it safe but fun while they're here. This is the best Christmas ever."

Brothers Eric and Sonny Sablan, both Specialists, also



SHAN SEMAN

Sgt. Ryan Camacho hugs his children shortly after exiting from the arrival gate of the Francisco C. Ada-Saipan International Airport Wednesday night. Camacho, along with other reservists in Echo Company as well as active military personnel, arrived to spend the holidays with family and friends.

expressed joy on returning for the holidays.

"This feels so good," 21-year-old Eric said. "Of course I miss my family and I will spend time with my family and savor every moment."

Sonny echoed similar

thoughts, saying "The training is good, and coming back home for Christmas is a relief, not just for me but for all of the guys. Training at times can be stressful, so this is like a break for us now until we head back."

Sonny indicated that support

from family and community members do make a difference in their time away.

"One thing we rely on is the support we get from our families and everyone...it's what keeps us working hard over there," he said.

Sonny said he and the other soldiers from the CNMI treat each other like a big family. "Coming from a small island...it's like a brotherhood, and we help each other and remain focused."

Manny Camacho, Sonny and Eric's uncle, was himself very excited at the return of the two. "We're so happy they're back. The entire family is so proud of them and what they're doing," he said.

Many of the troops are on the receiving end of a holiday treat as various agencies, individuals, local artists, schools and other pulled together to host a fundraiser concert yesterday evening at the American Memorial Park. Proceeds of the concert would go toward defraying some of the cost incurred by the troops in coming home. The rest of the amount would be donated to a non-profit group in Iraq.

Company E left Saipan last August for training in Hawaii, and was most recently in Fort Bliss, Texas. After their brief stay, the troops will leave for Fort Polk, Louisiana for further training before deployment to Iraq in February.

DIABETES  
+GREEN

LOTTERY

The Saipan Tribune accepts contributed photos of holidays, weddings, baptisms, and other community and family events for free publication. Material submitted should be original and not copyrighted, in digital or print format. Must include a caption containing complete details (a description of the event, location of the persons in the picture, the date, and the place), the name of the contributor, and a contact number. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to edit the caption, the date of publication and the size of the picture. Contributors are e-mail their submissions to [editor@saipantribune.com](mailto:editor@saipantribune.com). To check if contributions are received, call 223-6207, 223-3446, or 223-8743.

# Ex-speaker Rasa, wife arrested on theft charges

By JOHN RAVELO  
REPORTER

Authorities arrested former House Speaker Oscar C. Rasa and his wife Patricia over theft charges that accused them of scheming to defraud an 82-year-old businessman by claiming that they would receive over \$1 million in land compensation from the government.

Armed with an arrest warrant, police caught the Rasa couple at the Aqua Resort Club Wednesday. Superior Court judge Ramona Manglona issued the warrant after the Attorney General’s Investigative Unit charged the Rasas with theft and theft by deception.

Clad in orange prison suits, the Rasas appeared at Manglona’s courtroom yesterday morning on their request for modification of the \$30,000 bail imposed by the judge on each of them.

The judge said the Rasas could be temporarily released to their son Oscar Rasa II if they post 10 percent of the bail amount—or \$3,000 each. As third-party custodian, the son told the court that he would not hesitate to call the police if his parents violate the con-

ditions of their release after posting the required bond. As of press time, however, the Rasas have yet to post bail.

In an affidavit submitted to the court, AGIU investigator Juanette David-Atalig accused the Rasas of deceiving businessman Richard Szumiel of their capability to repay an outstanding loan. The couple allegedly misrepresented that they would receive over \$1 million from the government’s land compensation fund.

Verification made by Atalig with the Marianas Public Lands Authority showed that the Rasas do not have any pending land compensation claim.

“The pertinent land claimed to be due compensation by the Rasas had already been transferred to another individual long before these transactions took place with Mr. Szumiel,” the investigator said.

Szumiel reportedly issued to the Rasas 28 checks totaling \$72,000 from December 2003 to June 2004, and some \$7,500 in cash, the investigator said. The Rasas managed to win the trust of Szumiel after the couple helped facilitate the cancellation of his adopted son’s farm plot revocation. Before

this, the Rasas frequently visited one of Szumiel’s tenants.

After helping Szumiel’s adopted son, the Rasas allegedly began asking him for loans, making promises of repayment as soon as the government pays their purported land compensation claim, the investigator said.

Szumiel began doubting the Rasas repayment capability when the former lawmaker failed to show up at their agreed place in June 2004, after the latter promised to make some payment. He verified the matter with the MPLA, where he reportedly learned that the Rasas did not have any land compensation claim. Szumiel claimed that the Rasas began avoiding him since then.

Szumiel reported the matter to police. The AGIU investigator said she attempted to

See EX-SPEAKER on Page 12

CAMACHO

CB CRUZ

ACE

SAUNSHINE  
AUTO

PACIFIC MED

SOMJAI

MCDO



# CNMI and Guam not paying governors association dues?

By LIBERTY DONES  
REPORTER

The CNMI and Guam have reportedly not been paying their dues to the Western Governor's Association, aligning themselves as "delinquent" members of the group.

A Dec. 20, 2004 report on *The Oregonian* about the Oregon state not paying dues to the WGA and the National Governors Association had cited Texas, Kansas, Hawaii, Guam, and the CNMI on the list of states or territories that have not paid WGA dues.

When asked about this yesterday, Gov. Juan N. Babauta and Finance Secretary Fermin Atalig both expressed lack of knowledge about being behind the dues.

"We do pay," Babauta quickly said but later hesitated, saying, "I'll check the record."

Offhand, he said that the CNMI may have been paying the National Governor's Association, but possibly not the WGA.

"We will check the billing. I don't remember getting a bill," said Atalig.

The CNMI Legislature appropriates over \$20,000 a year for the NGA.

For FY05, the Legislature ap-

proved \$29,141 for NGA. The appropriation does not reflect funds for WGA.

Both associations are focused on lobbying the federal government on the environment, education, health care, and other issues where states and insular areas have common interests.

The *Oregonian* report said that Oregon stopped paying its annual membership fee of \$98,600 to NGA since 2001 due to a tight budget. As for WGA, it last paid its annual dues of \$36,000 in 2002.

The report indicated, though, that both associations would welcome back delinquent members when their finances improve, without paying past dues.

WGA members include the governors of Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

WGA, which meets once a year, plans, manages and reports on its activities in four program areas: Regional Development, Environmental Management, Lands and Water, and Bringing the West to Washington.

## Christmas Masses Schedule

**Mt. Carmel Cathedral**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
8:00 p.m. (Chamorro/Carolinian)  
10:00 p.m. (English/Tagalog)  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
9:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m.

**Kristo Rai Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
8:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m.

**San Jude Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
6:00 p.m., 9:00 p.m., 12:00 a.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
10:00 a.m.

**San Antonio Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
7:00 p.m. (Chamorro/English)  
10:00 p.m. (Filipino Mass)  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
8:00 a.m.

**San Jose Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
7:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
7:30 a.m.

**Santa Soledad Mission**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
7:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
8:00 a.m.

**San Roque Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
10:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
9:00 a.m.

**Santa Remedios Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
8:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
7:30 a.m.

**San Vicente Parish**  
Christmas Eve Mass-Dec 24  
7:00 p.m.  
Christmas Day Mass-Dec 25  
8:00 a.m.

## COMMUNITY

### Sabalu Farmers Market held today

The Saipan Sabalu Farmers Market would like to inform the general public that, since Christmas Day, Dec. 25, will fall on Saturday, the regularly scheduled market will be held today, Friday, Dec. 24, instead of Saturday, at the same time and place.

### 2004 W-2CM forms distribution ongoing

The Division of Revenue and Taxation wishes to inform all CNMI employers that the distribution of the 2004 W-2CM forms and Instructions has started and is now ongoing.

All businesses and employers are asked, to pick up forms during the regular business hours, from 8am to 4pm at the office of the Division of Revenue and Taxation located at the Dandan Commercial Center. The deadline for filing 2004 W-2CM form is Feb. 28, 2005 at 4:30pm.

### Public notice to first time homeowners

The Northern Marianas Housing Corp. said that it is extending the deadline for first-time homeowners to submit housing loan applications for the Plumeria Estates.

NMHC encourages all interested applicants to pick up an application at its central office in Garapan, Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 4:30pm, except holidays, and to have the applications submitted as soon as they can. For any inquiries on the matter, call one of NMHC's loan officers at 234-9447/7689/7670.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 7, 2004											
DEPARTURES						ARRIVALS					
Saipan-Sanum						Sanum-Saipan					
CO 900	8:00am	8:45am	1,3			CO 901	7:00pm	7:00pm	1,3,4,5,7		
CO 902	8:15am	8:55am	4,7			CO 901	7:00pm	8:45am	2		
CO 903	8:30am	8:10am	2,6			CO 902	8:00am	8:00am	1,4,5,7		
CO 904	8:45am	8:15am	1,3,4,5,6,7			CO 903	8:15am	11:45am	Daily		
CO 905	8:55am	1:00pm	8			CO 904	8:40pm	1:00pm	1,5,7		
CO 906	10:00am	11:00pm	1,4,7			CO 904	8:50pm	4:00pm	Daily		
CO 907	10:00am	2:00pm	Daily			CO 905	4:00pm	8:00pm	1,6		
CO 908	10:30am	2:00pm	1,3,4,5,6,7			CO 906	4:00pm	8:00pm	3,6		
CO 909	1:20pm	2:15pm	Daily			CO 907	4:30pm	8:20pm	2,4,7		
CO 910	1:30pm	2:40pm	1,3,4,5,7			CO 908	7:00pm	8:00pm	Daily		
CO 911	1:30pm	2:40pm	1,3,4,5,7			CO 909	8:40pm	10:00pm	Daily		
CO 912	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 910	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 913	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 911	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 914	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 912	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 915	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 913	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 916	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 914	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 917	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 915	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 918	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 916	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 919	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 917	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 920	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 918	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 921	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 919	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 922	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 920	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 923	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 921	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 924	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 922	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 925	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 923	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 926	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 924	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 927	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 925	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 928	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 926	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 929	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 927	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
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CO 946	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 944	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
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CO 948	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 946	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 949	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 947	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 950	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 948	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 951	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 949	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 952	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 950	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
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CO 1012	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1010	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1013	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1011	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1014	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1012	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1015	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1013	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1016	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1014	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1017	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1015	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1018	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1016	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1019	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1017	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1020	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1018	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1021	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1019	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1022	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1020	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1023	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1021	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1024	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1022	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1025	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1023	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1026	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1024	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1027	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1025	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1028	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1026	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1029	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1027	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1030	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1028	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
CO 1031	1:30pm	2:40pm	Daily			CO 1029	8:40pm	7:00pm	Daily		
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# Troop Fest bolsters support for NMI soldiers

By SHAN SEMAN  
REPORTER

The American Memorial Park was a magnet for community members who flocked to the amphitheatre yesterday evening for a concert intended to show support to military troops with ties to the Commonwealth who returned home for the holidays.

With contributions and efforts from various businesses, government agencies, schools, organizations, and individuals, the troops were treated to a benefit concert, dubbed Troop Fest 2004, which featured live performances from local artists,

students, JROTC school organizations, and others.

The event, held from 4pm to 10pm, also featured a performance by the Kagman High School JROTC rifle drill team, and as of press time, performances by Nolas Kaliga, the Garapan Girls Scout, a youth group organized by producer and artist Sam Joyner, as well as musicians Soreen Villanueva, Ed Diaz Jr., James Santos, and Eric Atalig.

Others scheduled to perform were Local Boys, Northern Star, Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School, Kevin Lynch, Garapan Elementary School, Fro-

zen N, Mt. Carmel School, Te Kanahau Nui Dancers, William S. Reyes Elementary School, Junior Serenaders Band, What Ever Band, Tropical Blenz, and Sebastian Camacho.

In their event message, Gov. Juan N. Babauta and Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente expressed gratitude to all organizers and supporters of the concert.

“Nothing is more uplifting for a military member than a greeting from home, and that is the purpose of Troop Fest—to let them know we care about them and respect the sacrifices they are making on our behalf,” they said. “From performers to

sponsors to families to corporations to you who are here, all of us are sending a clear message that we honor and respect our servicemen and women for protecting us against the terrorism that threatens our freedoms and the way we live.”

John Simon, a construction worker, indicated that his presence at the concert was “in support” of all military personnel.

“I am not related to any of the soldiers here and I don’t know them personally, but I came here to support because they are doing what they’re doing for us,” said Simon shortly after purchasing a yellow ribbon. “The

guys in the reserve and also the ones that are active, I think they’re doing something special and we should all put in some of our time to at least show them that ‘hey, we’re thinking of you guys and your families. Lets have fun together.’”

Troop Fest co-chair Edward Manibusan also voiced similar sentiments. “During this holiday season and throughout the year, we pause and pay tribute to all our soldiers especially

those from the CNMI who are serving faithfully during this time of danger,” he said in a statement. “Through your sacrifices, you have made possible for your families, friends, and fellow citizens the freedom, democracy, and opportunities we enjoy.”

The festival will be produced in DVD and copies will be distributed to military personnel free of charge.

The festival also included the weekly Garapan Street Market.

## Nightclub accused of employing minor and of immigration fraud

The Attorney General’s Office filed multiple charges against a businessman and his nightclub for employing illegal aliens and exploiting at least one minor who worked as exotic dancer.

Eric O’Malley, the CNMI’s immigration enforcement attorney, filed with the Superior Court 19 criminal counts against 33-year-old Takayuki Umeda and Japan Enterprises Corp., which does business as Club Micronesia.

O’Malley said the nightclub employed at least one under-aged girl from June to July 2004 and let her “engage in prohibited conduct.”

The prosecutor said the defendants facilitated the girl’s entry from Manila, the Philippines, to Saipan through forged documents. He accused the

defendants of harboring the girl despite knowing that she was staying in the Commonwealth illegally.

He said the defendants knowingly subscribed as true a false statement in applying for the girl’s nonresident worker’s permit. He said the defendants made the girl subscribe as true alleged false statements on these documents.

O’Malley charged the defendants with unlawful exploitation of a minor, and three counts each of employment of an illegal alien, harboring of an illegal alien, immigration fraud, solicitation, conspiracy, and aiding, abetting and encouraging illegal entry.

The charges also pertain to Club Micronesia’s unlawful employment of two other workers from June to July. (*John Ravelo*)

# TSA issues tips for hassle-free travel

By AGNES E. DONATO  
REPORTER

Leave is restricted for Transportation Security Administration employees to ensure checkpoints are fully staffed during the holidays.

Assistant federal security director Viola Sablan said the restriction will be effective for the entire month of December until after New Year’s Day, in view of the expected influx of tourists to the Northern Marianas.

She said TSA employees may only take leave for medical or other emergency purposes. “We’re restricting all vacation leave,” she added.

Citing TSA’s staffing problem, Sablan reiterated her call for passengers to help TSA make the screening process faster and more efficient.

She said travelers can start by ensuring that they do not bring any prohibited items to the airport. Travelers are also urged not to over-pack their bags, as opening and closing overstuffed bags can be difficult and result in delays.

Sablan also encouraged travelers not to bring wrapped presents, as screeners will need to unwrap them if the package triggers the alarm. Instead, she recommended that passengers either wrap their gifts

when they get to their final destinations, or ship wrapped packages ahead of time.

Further, passengers are asked to avoid wearing shoes, clothing, jewelry and accessories that contain metal, as these may set off the alarm on the metal detector.

Sablan also gave the following tips to avoid secondary screening:

- Get to the airport ahead of time.
- Check the contents of your pockets and bags, particularly carry-on luggage to ensure no prohibited items are inadvertently packed.
- Have your valid passport and boarding pass available

for presentation.

- Unlock your bags. Do not fasten the belts. Do not strap the bags with strings.
- Remove old airline tags.
- Have luggage keys ready upon completion of the screening procedure.
- While waiting in line, place all metal items in a carry on bag. These include cigarette case, jewelry, loose change, keys, mobile phones, pagers, and personal data assistants, or PDAs.
- Take out laptop computers and outer coats, and place them in separate bins.

In related news, Sablan said TSA-Saipan will host its 1st Annual Awards Ceremony





TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities executive director Thomas J. Camacho, second from right, recently met with transportation representatives and officials in Washington, D.C. to finalize transportation technical assistance support intended for the CNMI. Front row from left, Governmental Affairs and Training, Community Transportation Association of America assistant director Chris Zeilinger; Rural Transits Technical Assistance Program director under the American Public Works Association Beth Denniston; CNMI Resident Representative to the United States Pete A. Tenorio; Camacho; and CART, VA president Betty Newell,. Back row from left, Easter Seals Project ACTION director Karen Wolf-Branigin, and RTAP's Dave Barr.

'Separation of utility services complicated'

By LIBERTY DONES  
REPORTER

The Legislature has warned about the proposed separation of public utilities, citing that it may violate a federal agreement, among others.

House Vice Speaker Timothy Villagomez said Wednesday that the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. should be cautious with its actions as it is subject to the terms and conditions of its partnership agreement with the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Villagomez said that the partnership agreement "goes against the separation" of water, sewer, and power utilities.

"That [agreement] has to be considered," he said.

Further, Villagomez, who chairs the House Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications, said that creating an entirely new department for water and

sewer services would cost a lot of money.

"I have not seen anything that could be tapped for that. There's just no funding, not in this new appropriation bill," said the lawmaker.

Villagomez, a former CUC executive director, said he has not seen any draft legislation for the proposed separation of services.

He said that even if the governor would issue an executive order authorizing the separation of the two services from the CUC, it still requires the approval of the Legislature.

"Even with that [executive order], it has to go through legislation," he said.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta earlier said that he might decide to issue an executive order to effect the separation of the utilities, if legislative action is not made promptly.

"The way to separate it is through legislation, but if it's

going to take a long time, I'd issue an executive order. That's being contemplated on," Babauta had said.

The CUC board of directors had adopted a resolution urging the Babauta administration to initiate the amendment to the CUC Act to remove the water and sewer operations from the utility firm's responsibility.

The CUC board said that getting rid of the sewer and water services would promote greater efficiency in the delivery of these programs.

CUC said that the Legislature might create a separate entity—which may be called the "CNMI Waterworks Authority"—to manage the operation of water and sewer services.

The proposed agency authority would be placed under the CNMI central government, while the CUC, would continue to be an autonomous agency, handling only power generation and distribution.

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# Verizon upgrades DSL

As part of efforts to continue to bring world-class communications to the islands, Verizon will be automatically upgrading the DSL speed of its customers as a free gift for the holidays.

“If you have not signed up for Verizon’s DSL services, then this is the time to enroll. With the newly upgraded speeds, customers can now surf the Internet superhighway in an instant,” the company said in a statement.

With this upgrade, Verizon’s Nitro DSL users will now be experiencing quicker downloads at a rate of up to 512K and uploads of up to 386K. This service is offered at only \$50 per month.

Customers who have signed up with the Supercharged DSL service will also be upgraded and can now download information up to 768K while uploads are up to 512K. Due to the quicker speed, this service will be billed at \$85 per month.

Turbocharged users will be experiencing the fastest speeds as they cruise the Internet at rate of up to 1MG while uploads are up to a rate of 768K. This service is being offered at \$135 per month.

For existing customers, the new speeds will be automatically upgraded into their system. They do not have to fill out any

forms to sign up for this feature. However, new customers must drop by the Verizon customer service center on Middle Road to sign up for the DSL service.

“What makes our DSL service extremely popular to our customers is the convenience of being online at all times. They never have to dial up. They just click on the Internet browser and they can begin surfing the Internet,” said Verizon marketing manager Russ Quinn.

Quinn said many customers are happy about the fact that multiple computers can share the connection. Therefore, customers do not have to have a dedicated port for each computer.

“With the DSL service, the technology allows you to browse the Internet and talk on the same phone line. There is no need for a second line,” he said.

In addition to the faster speed, Verizon will also be waiving the installation fees for DSL service beginning Dec. 10, 2004 until February 2005. “This is another reason why this is the best time to enroll today,” said Quinn.

For more information, call 234-7143. You can also visit the company’s website at [www.vzpacifica.net](http://www.vzpacifica.net). to find out more about Verizon’s products and services.

NIKKO

PANDA STORE





# Opinion

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## The price gouging stupor



**EDITORIAL POLICY** The Saipan Tribune welcomes contributions by article, column, editorial or topical news item to be read by the public. Letters to the editor must include the name, address, and contact number of the contributor. Letters that are critical and/or abusive of individuals, organizations, or personalities. Contributors receive a copy of \$50 worth of time for their contribution if published. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to publish contributions or edit the copy to suit the needs of length, accuracy and clarity and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be made via email to the 2nd Floor, Century Insurance Building, South Road, Saipan, 96959. (670) 235-2769 or via fax to (670) 235-2769 or through our website at [www.saipantribune.com](http://www.saipantribune.com).

Letters to the Editor

Azmar’s worst nightmare

# More visitors seen for the Marianas

By AGNES E. DONATO  
REPORTER

Saipan and Guam are expected to receive 8.8 percent of the almost 600,000 Japanese tourists who will be traveling outside their country between Dec. 23 and Jan. 3, the peak season for Japanese tourists, according to a report by a top travel management agency.

JTB Corp. projected that about 52,000 Japanese tourists will visit Saipan and Guam during the year-end/New Year season. This represents an increase of 6.1 percent from last year and 85.7 percent from 2002.

JTB's projections were based on a questionnaire survey of 2,200 travelers, bookings with JTB offices, airline reservations, and industry trends. The survey was conducted from Nov. 3 through Nov. 12, 2004 at some 200 locations throughout Japan.

About 591,000 Japanese are expected to travel overseas during the New Year season.

It is estimated that 321,000 of these will go to Asian destinations, with 82,000 traveling to Korea, 80,000 to China, and 39,000 to Thailand.

Although it is projected that most Japanese travelers will be heading to

nearby destinations, the number of travelers from Japan to Europe is expected to reach 66,000.

Survey results also show that Hawaii will receive 62,000 Japanese tourists during the holiday season.

Asked about their ideal travel, about 22 percent of the survey respondents picked relaxing at tropical islands such as Hawaii and Saipan. The choice came second only to relaxing at hot springs or eating New Year cuisine.

Of the respondents, 18.1 percent said they prefer relaxing at an Okinawan resort while 10.3 percent picked sleeping

away the New Year at an overseas resort on Bali or Tahiti. Another 9.9 percent said they would like to experience New Year in the southern hemisphere in Australia.

The JTB report said the year-end/New Year holiday will generally run for four days from Dec. 31 through Jan. 3.

The report noted that more Japanese tourists are choosing Asian destinations because of fears over the SARS epidemic are gone and because the shorter holiday period makes it impractical to visit remote destinations.

JTB estimated that an outbound

Japanese tourist will spend an average \$2,048 for their trip, down by 4.4 percent from last year.

"The average expenditures for overseas travel are expected to decline because of the increase in travel to nearby Asian destinations and under the additional effect of higher exchange rates for the yen," JTB explained.

The average length of journeys in days is also expected to be slightly down for both domestic and overseas travel, from 3.7 days to 3.6, due to the increase in travel to closer destinations, JTB added.

## \$20M

From Page 1

years—the biggest spending in CNMI history.

"That's the reason why the economy has picked up," Schwalbach said.

He said, though, that the federal money was pumped primarily into the construction business.

"Not much of it went to education. So I think that's the reason why the governor is giving this substantial amount to PSS," Schwalbach added.

Babauta, who had thought to use the Compact money as leverage to pay off the government's debts, earlier said he would divide the grant funds among key government agencies such as PSS, Department of Public Health, Department of Public Safety, and the Northern Marianas College.

The PSS had aggressively lobbied for a share in the Compact funds, saying that its immediate needs even exceed the available annual grant of \$5.1 million. In March this year, PSS submitted a revised request for Compact Impact funding totaling over \$7 million.

PSS said it needs \$3 million for school repair and maintenance; \$1 million for school buses; \$600,000 for copiers; over \$2 million for 31 classrooms for Kagman kindergarten to 3rd grade students; \$311,000 for the Sinapalo elementary school playground; \$80,000 for a Kagman High School stage, and \$50,000 for 25 computers to allow the implementation of a student information system.

Last January, PSS submitted a \$5.6-million funding request to cover the educational-related costs of Freely Associated States students in the CNMI.

PSS had said that \$1.8 million would be needed for personnel and operating support cost of FAS students, \$2.6 million for the classroom needs of FAS students, and \$1.25 million for buses.

There are currently 516 FAS students enrolled with PSS, comprising 5 percent of the total PSS population. PSS puts at \$3,520 the educational cost per student.

The Compact funding of \$5.1 million is the CNMI's share in the \$30 million federal appropriation to compensate territories on FAS migration-related costs.

The Compact legislation provides that \$30 million will be divided each year for the next 20 years among the CNMI, Guam, Hawaii, and American Samoa to help these jurisdictions deal with the effects of migration from FSM, Palau and the Marshall Islands, which are commonly known as the freely associated states or FAS.

The funds are to be divided proportionally among the jurisdictions on the basis of the number of people in each jurisdiction who migrated from FAS after 1986, when the original Compacts went into effect.

Yesterday's meeting was also attended by BOE members Marja Lee Taitano, Dino Jones, PSS finance director Richard Waldo, PSS federal program coordinator Tim Thornburgh as well as Finance Secretary Fermin Atalig and governor's CIP management consultant Charles Jordan.

Education officials, who have been complaining about the lack of funds, appeared very delighted but composed, only exchanging glances with one another.

They said they would sit down again with administration officials to finalize the report to be submitted to the Department of the Interior.

## RED

From Page 1

Chaba. Typhoon Chaba is closed, done, finished," said an American Red Cross Saipan chapter official who didn't want herself identified for fear pranksters might use her name to carry out the prank.

According to her the Red Cross has received numerous phone calls asking about the terminated relief effort for victims of Typhoon Chaba, which struck the Marianas hard last August.

She said a dozen phone calls and even an actual visit from a Filipino couple inquiring about the said relief effort was received by the Red Cross yesterday. She said the chapter has been getting calls from the public for three days now.

Each day, the office receives two dozens calls from troubled families. She said victims of the prank told her that an unidentified man has been calling homes and associates himself with the Red Cross. The victims described the caller as an American-sounding man.

She said the phone conversation goes like this: "Hi, this is Ivan from the Red Cross. You need to call Red Cross right away, because of your claim due to Typhoon Chaba."

The startled families would then ask him why, and the man would simply say he would call back later and hang up. Excited, and at the same time confused by the call, families would immediately dial the Red Cross number and verify the call. The local chapter of ARC has no idea why this man is doing the calls.

The Red Cross office also serves as a bridge to families with members serving in the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq. If a relative gets into a mishap, the Red Cross would immediately go to the family and inform them of the news.

"So you could just imagine the tension and grief the prank causes to these families," the officer said. "Like a death in the family, this poor people would think that something has happened to their loved one."

She encourages the public to be vigilant on this matter. "If you have caller ID, please contact our office immediately and tell us the number and we will forward the number to the authorities," she added.

The Red Cross has already done an e-mail blast to dispel the hoax and help inform the public about the scam.

"If this was a joke, then it is not funny. If you get a call regarding Typhoon Chaba, don't believe it, it's a lie. If you got the number call the chapter immediately," she assured the public.

The local chapter of the American Red Cross will resume office on Monday. The public is encouraged to call their office at 234-3459 for clarifications.

## PASSING

From Page 1

as to how this will affect the number of the CNMI's licensed nurses?

According to Rosa "Chai" Tudela, associate director for Nursing Services at the Commonwealth Health Center, this revision was not reached in just a short span of time. She said it takes six years for the council to revisit the process.

"Every six years the committee evaluates the standard. If in six years almost every taker passes the exam, that means the exam has become easy," she said.

Consequently, the committee has to revise the test to conform with the changing times. The passing grade for registered

nurses was revised early this year.

"What they're saying is that you're going to see more nurses failing because the tests have changed," Tudela said. "But once you see a lot of people passing, that means you have to revise."

She also added that because of changes in technology and knowledge, the test plan must be changed. As a result scores must also be improved. "Then of course you're going to see more failing rates," Tudela said.

Eventually, though, she said the rate will even up in time, considering that takers will adjust and study harder to make it on the exam. That means that, after six years, the system will be assessed again, possibly for a higher

passing mark as required.

For nurses who took the exam years ago, as in the case of Tudela, she said she would definitely have difficulties in the exam—the reason why the council has been encouraging them to continue learning and honing their skills. The council introduced the Continuing Education program for the group.

"That's how we have to keep ourselves trained by attending classes through this Continuing Education program," Tudela said. The program requires senior nurses to attend classes to update them on new technologies, new drugs, and procedures in medical science.

Though the revision does not auto-

matically spare nurses who took the exam earlier or years ago, Nathania Maui, a local nurse who took the exam in 1969, simply smiled about the issue. "We have to go with the flow. Whether we like it or not we have to catch up," she said, "If I would take the exam today, I would flunk!" she laughed. Hence, these nurses believed that they have to learn now through continuing education.

If in case takers would fail on the revised test plan, they would only have to take it again in due time. Nurses who would take the licensure exam may be affected by the revisions, but at the end of the day the council and the committee ensures the best quality servicing professionals will be products of this step.

## DEPOSITION

From Page 1

his authorization on the drawdown of the land compensation claim by the Malite estate.

Atalig's withdrawal rendered moot the request for preliminary injunction, which had sought to prevent the claim's release to Malite estate administrator Jesus Tudela.

The withdrawal of the injunction request also rendered moot the subpoenas issued to several government officials, including Gov. Juan N. Babauta. Defendants Marianas Public Lands Authority, its board of directors, and acting commissioner Edward DeLeon Guerrero had wanted these officials to produce documents and have them examined on the witness stand in connection with the injunction request.

Government officials led by Babauta, as well as heirs to the Malite estate, had packed the courtroom of Superior Court judge Juan T. Lizama yesterday but, instead of testifying, ended up being part of the audience.

"We didn't object [to the withdrawal

of the injunction request]," said Malite estate attorney Pedro Atalig, who added, though, that he questions the sincerity of the Attorney General's Office. "We feel they're playing with taxpayer's money."

"We were ready to proceed and show that this [land compensation] claim is more than legitimate," added Atalig.

MPLA attorneys earlier subpoenaed Babauta, Brown, Fermin Atalig, Sachs, assistant attorney general Daniel L. Furrh, CDA board chair Sixto K. Igisomar and executive director Maria Lourdes S. Ada.

Babauta and Fermin Atalig filed Wednesday their respective requests to quash the subpoenas against them, but the judge denied the requests, prompting the officials to appear in court with their attorneys.

The two officials and the attorney general filed with the Supreme Court yesterday morning a petition for a writ of mandamus, which seeks to compel judge Lizama to vacate his order denying the quash request and to grant that request.

Sachs, however, withdrew the injunction request in the Superior Court

proceeding. No deposition of subpoenaed witnesses took place.

MPLA and Malite estate attorneys jointly asked the court to impose sanctions on the CNMI government and hold them liable for the defendants' attorney's fees for failing to inform them ahead of time that the injunction request would be withdrawn. MPLA lawyer Matthew Gregory said this resulted in unnecessary waste of time and costs associated with yesterday's appearance in court.

Former government officials—Gov. Froilan Tenorio, attorney general Robert Torres, and congressman Stanley Torres—joined the packed gallery of the courtroom.

Defendants in the suit include the MPLA; acting commissioner DeLeon Guerrero and its board of directors, including chairperson Ana Demapan-Castro and members Nicolas Nekai, Felix Sasamoto, Manny Villagomez, and Benita Atalig-Manglona; the Commonwealth Development Authority; and Tudela, the estate's administrator.

Brown had filed the lawsuit on behalf of the CNMI government, citing a "strong appearance of ethical

impropriety and conflicts of interest," in the MPLA's approval of the land compensation claim by the Malite estate, a matter that had been decided by the Trust Territory court in 1978.

In that order, the TT court awarded some \$3,682 to the estate for condemnation of some 6,900-sqm lot that now forms part of Saipan's Marianas High School. The estate claimed that it has not received any payment from the government.

## EX-SPEAKER

From Page 3

interview the Rasas several times from September to November, but the defendants never met with her for the interview.

Investigation revealed that the former lawmaker endorsed one check in the amount of \$2,800, while his wife endorsed almost all the checks issued by Szumiel.

The judge prohibited the Rasas from having contact with Szumiel and ordered the defendants to surrender their travel documents.



SAIPAN TRIBUNE	FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2004	<b>13</b>
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SAIPAN TRIBUNE	FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2004	<b>23</b>
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SAIPAN TRIBUNE	FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2004	<b>37</b>
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# Verizon to hold last After-Hours Sale of the year

Today, Dec. 17, will be the last After-Hours Sale that Verizon will be holding for the year, according to an announcement issued by the company yesterday.

“If you have not yet completed your Christmas shopping, then come on down to the Verizon customer service center in Chalan Laulau to get the great deals that are happening at Verizon,” the company said.

The LG VX6000 will once again be on special for only \$145.95; conditions apply. For people who are looking for a camera phone as a gift, Verizon said it has the best deal on island for you.

“One of the features that makes our camera phone popular is the fact that you can actually send and receive photos from other Verizon customers. With our system, Verizon customers must type in 670, the cell



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Hundreds of customers line up at the Verizon After-Hours Sale on Friday, Nov. 26, 2004 to get some of the coolest phones out on the market. The next After-Hours Sale will be held today, Dec. 17, 2004 from 5:30pm to 9pm at the Verizon Customer Service Center on Middle Road.

phone number, and then complete the address by typing in @pix.vztxt.com. Therefore, if a customer’s number is 287-0000, then you would send the photos to 670287000@pix.vztxt.com,”

said Verizon marketing manager Russ Quinn.

Customers who are ready to turn in their cell phones for the popular Modotell or the Kyocera 2235 can bring in their cell phones and wall charger, whether it is in working condition or not, and get either phone(s) for only \$49.99.

This deal includes a \$10 calling card, a car charger, and a leather case while supplies last.

Customers who wish to purchase the phones without a trade in will be allowed to purchase the phones at the special price of only \$59.99. This deal will also come with a \$10 calling card, a car charger, and a leather case.

Free gifts will be given away with each purchase of a cell phone so come on down today to Verizon in Chalan Laulau between 5:30pm to 9pm to find a deal that is right for you.

## Groups extend appreciation *CHC Volunteers says thanks...*

The CHC Volunteers would like to thank everyone who purchased tickets and all those who helped sell tickets for their tremendous effort to make the group’s Annual Thanksgiving Turkey Raffle one of the most successful ever.

“We would also like to thank the following companies for their annual generous donations toward our turkey raffle: Northwest Airlines; Freedom Air; Pacific Islands Aviation, Rita and Juan Tenorio; Microl Corp.; Triple J Five Star Wholesale; D&Q Saipan; Aqua Resort; Dai-Ichi Hotel; Pacific Islands Club; Coral Ocean Point; Duty Free Shoppers; and Lani Diaz.

“Congratulations to all the winners. All prizes have been claimed and we hope you enjoyed your turkey dinners as well as all the prizes,” the group said in a statement.

## *...as well as CNMI AFWD*

The CNMI Association of Families with Disabilities (CNMI AFWD) wishes to give a deep and profound appreciation to all who supported the dinner fundraiser on Dec. 3, 2004, which helped us build a strong foundation and capacity for people with disabilities and their needs. Your generosity and strong community support will be forever cherished.

JOETEN MOTORS  
+BLUE

GREE



Letters to the Editor

BABY NEWS

# Federal funding needed for Kagman project

By MARCONI CALINDAS  
REPORTER

The House of Representatives has backed efforts of the Pacific Basin Association of Conservation Districts and the Saipan and Northern Islands Soil and Water Conservation District to secure federal funding to complete the Kagman watershed project.

In separate resolutions passed Friday, the lower chamber also called on the Commonwealth Development Authority to coordinate with the Pacific Basin Office and the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service for the introduction of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to

farmers and ranchers throughout the CNMI. House Resolution 14-100 in particular said that additional federal funding would go a long way in completing the Kagman project. The funding will be used for the installation of flood control measures and irrigation water distribution systems. The project

aims to secure agricultural productivity and wildlife habitat protection, reduce pressure on the aquifer and ensure a healthier marine environment. This project also intends to be a model for other Pacific Basin territories and island nations for collaborative and community-based planning. In H.R. 14-101, it asked CDA

to work with acting director of the Pacific Basin Office Ronald L. Hilliard and district conservationist J. Scott Crockett of the USDA in introducing local farmers to EQIP, a voluntary USDA conservation program that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. It provides financial and technical support to farm-

ers and ranchers to implement structural and management conservation practices on eligible agricultural land. It also aims to create environmental awareness by introducing and reminding local farmers and ranchers of conservation practices, management measures needed to address land-use related problems.

# AGO told to amend charging documents vs Stanley—again

By JOHN RAVELO  
REPORTER

Superior Court judge Juan T. Lizama on Wednesday directed government prosecutors to amend—for the second time—the charging documents against former congressman Stanley Torres.

The judge also instructed deputy attorney general Clyde Lemons Jr. to provide additional details on his accusations against Torres. The judge said specific details could be included in the second amended criminal information, or stated in a separate document. “The court agrees with defendant Torres that the preamble section is inflammatory and unnecessary. The prosecution shall submit an amended information with the preamble removed,” the judge ruled.

The judge first compelled Lemons and CNMI chief prosecutor David Hutton to amend the charging documents to include the name of the attorney general—Pamela Brown—on whose prosecutorial authority the case is being brought before the court. The former congressman had opposed Brown’s confirmation as attorney general and had later questioned the validity of her confirmation. Lizama’s ruling responded to the request of Torres’ lawyer, former attorney general Robert Torres, who had asked the court for a bill of particulars—a procedural device in criminal proceedings that informs the defendant of more specific details of the offenses charged to advise him and the court of what facts he will be required to meet. Robert Torres earlier chided

prosecutors for allegedly doing the criminal information improperly, attaching in one of his submissions to the court a copy of an excerpt from the indictment documents that charged former senators Ricardo Atalig and Jose Dela Cruz in federal court. Robert Torres said an elaborate discussion of the alleged fraudulent scheme and conspiracy the senators were accused of should also be done in the Superior Court case against Stanley Torres. The court had scheduled Stanley Torres’ jury trial to begin by July 5, 2005. The judge had also set a pre-trial conference on June 15, 2005, where exchange of witness lists by opposing parties, among others, could be made. Stanley Torres and co-defendant Dorothy Sablan, who

used to be the lawmaker’s office manager, are facing multiple charges of conspiracy to commit theft, conspiracy to commit theft by deception, and illegal use of public supplies, services, time and personnel. Stanley Torres also faces multiple counts of misconduct in public office, while prosecutors have also charged Sablan with multiple counts of theft, theft by deception and receiving stolen property. The Attorney General’s Office filed the charges against Torres, Sablan, and Frank Ada sometime last March. The court, however, has dismissed the charges against Ada, who used to be a legislative staff, without prejudice to their re-filing. Lemons had accused Torres and Sablan of engaging in a fraudulent scheme, wherein the latter received govern-

ment monies through payroll when she did not actually perform work. Sablan allegedly received at least five checks totaling \$5,384.67 in government pay-

roll in 2003, when she was actually off-island. Ada allegedly prepared fraudulent time and attendance sheets indicating that Sablan rendered work when she was off-island.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino held a *luau*, complete with Polynesian dancers, to spice up its Christmas party recently.

## Tinian Dynasty celebrates Christmas with ‘luau’

The *luau* of the year was recently held at the Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino ballroom, as the island’s biggest tourist draw paid tribute to the traditional cultural dances of the region. There were plenty of hip-shaking dancers adorned in bright colors that gyrated to the compelling beats of wooden drums. It brought to the fore the region’s traditional dances like the Hawaiian hula and Tahitian tamure. There was also some fire twirling to complete the evening’s festive atmosphere. The amazing part of all of these was Tinian Dynasty didn’t hire an entire production crew in the showcase, as the evening’s entertainment were rendered by their own staff, as well as employees of sister-company Tinian Shipping and Transportation Inc. Dubbed “Christmas on the Island,” the party had a very dis-

tinctive Polynesian and Hawaiian ambience with a modern twist, as traditional dance steps of the South Pacific were performed to Top 40 hits blasting from the venue’s giant speakers. How could a company staffed mostly by nonresident workers pull off a feat that required some assimilation with the islands? Simple, most of the workers have been living on the island for years now and have made Tinian their home, embracing the culture of the Marianas wholeheartedly. And to set the night off, a traditional Tinian feast was served to the employees, including roasted suckling pig and tropical fruit platters—the true flavor of the Marianas. Tinian Dynasty Hotel and Casino would like to wish all its local guests and patrons a very merry and safe Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

## Chamorro/Carolinian language survey on

The Chamorro/Carolinian Language Policy Commission is now conducting a community language survey on the indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian languages used at home and in the community. The survey will be conducted on the islands of Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and the Northern Islands. The commission is asking the community’s cooperation

in accommodating the persons tasked to conduct the survey as well as answer their questions as honestly as possible. The Chamorro/Carolinian Language Policy Commission is under the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs. For more information, call the Language Commission’s Office at 288-5321/26/27.

JOETEN MOTORS  
+BLUE



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# Business

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# Oil futures rise on cold weather

**SINGAPORE** (AP)—Oil futures jumped higher Thursday, after supplies of crude and heating oil in the United States shrank amid rising demand fueled by cold weather spreading across America’s Northeast and Midwest.

Traders said the market was also monitoring last-ditch efforts by beleaguered Russian oil giant Yukos to save its main subsidiary from being auctioned off by Moscow.

Midmorning Thursday in Asia, crude leapt 24 cents to US\$44.43 per barrel in after-hours electronic trade on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

On Wednesday, oil vaulted 5 percent higher to close at US\$44.19 after the midweek

U.S. Department of Energy report showed falls in distillate and crude stocks—exactly a week before the official onset of the Northern Hemisphere winter.

Rising U.S. inventories of crude oil and distillate fuel had been a factor in driving down crude futures by about US\$13 per barrel from the record closing high of US\$55.17 in late October.

Inventories of crude oil in the United States are still 6 percent above year-ago levels even though Washington reported Wednesday that supplies fell by 100,000 barrels last week to 293.8 million barrels.

The nation’s supply of distillate fuel, which includes heating oil and diesel, is 12 percent be-

low year-ago levels, unchanged from a week ago at 119.3 million barrels. High-sulfur distillates typically used for heating oil declined by 100,000 barrels to 49.9 million barrels, or 13 percent lower than a year ago.

“This shock came as the (U.S.) Northeast is being blanketed with cold weather for the first time this winter,” said Energyintel’s Matt Piotrowski in a research note. The weather is “lending significant support to heating oil futures, which have gained 12 percent since last Thursday’s close.”

In Asia Thursday, heating oil rose to US\$1.3966 per gallon (3.8 liters).

Yukos, meanwhile, was trying to block the govern-

ment-run auction of its Yuganskneftegaz subsidiary slated for Sunday. Russian authorities ordered the auction as part of their efforts to claim more than US\$25 billion (euro18.68 billion) in back taxes.

The company, which pumps a fifth of Russia’s oil, filed for bankruptcy in Houston in the U.S. states of Texas on Tuesday. A court will hear the company’s bid for a temporary restraining order to stop the auction later Thursday.

“Our management board concluded that there is absolutely no chance of our obtaining justice in the Russian court system,” Chief Financial Officer Bruce Misamore said in his affidavit submitted to the court.

# Japan manufacturers less upbeat this Dec.

**TOKYO** (AP)—Japanese companies were less upbeat in December than they were three months ago, amid recent data indicating that the world’s second-largest economy may be losing steam, a key government survey showed Wednesday.

In the Bank of Japan’s quarterly survey of companies, the index for large manufacturers for December fell to 22, from 26 for the previous survey in September. The index measures the percentage of companies

saying business conditions are better, minus the percentage saying they’re worse.

It was the first time the figure had fallen since March 2003. However, the index remains at a relatively high level, suggesting that corporate Japan still thinks the economy is on the mend.

The Bank of Japan relies on the poll, known as the “tankan,” for interest-rate policy decisions. Economists and investors look to it as a major benchmark of economic trends.

In the previous poll, the index had surged to 26—the highest level since May 1991, just as the nation’s speculative asset “bubble” burst in the late 1980s.

Overall, the tankan offered mixed signals to economists.

For large non-manufacturers—a segment that includes supermarkets, telecom companies and real estate agents—the index held steady at 11, unchanged from September’s survey. That figure remains at

its highest level since the early 1990s and beat economists’ expectations for a decline.

Big companies also said they plan to boost investment in new equipment for plants and offices by 7.7 percent this fiscal year, ending March 2005.

But the outlook for the months ahead was pessimistic, with large and small manufacturers predicting business conditions would deteriorate before the next survey in March.

# Honda admits cause of potential engine fires

By GREG SCHNEIDER  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Honda Motor Co. has acknowledged a problem with oil filters on CR-V sport-utility vehicles and is taking steps to prevent engine fires caused by oil leaks.

Beginning Friday, the company will mail notices to about 318,000 owners of 2003, 2004 and 2005 model-year CR-Vs, urging those who haven’t yet had initial oil changes to take certain precautions to avoid fires. Honda also has instructed dealers to replace oil filters on all unsold CR-Vs and has made manufacturing changes to prevent future problems.

The federal government is investigating a series of fires on the popular small SUVs that have occurred shortly after owners had the oil changed for the first time. According to Honda, problems arise when service technicians remove the original oil filter and the filter’s rubber gasket or seal remains stuck to the engine block. When a new filter is installed, it can’t fit properly over the old gasket, and oil leaks out onto a hot manifold, causing fire.

Honda has identified 72 such fires in the past year,

many occurring just a few miles from the shop or dealership that performed the initial oil change. No injuries have been reported, but many fires destroyed the vehicles. Many other cases of massive oil leaks caused smoke but were discovered before fire started.

Why the gaskets stick has been a mystery, and dealers have complained that Honda was trying to make them the scapegoats for a manufacturing or design problem. Thursday a spokesman for Honda said the company believes it has figured out the root cause.

“It’s due to a series of somewhat unusual circumstances that relate to the manufacture of the seal,” Honda spokesman Andy Boyd said. Two oil-filter suppliers, one in Japan and one in China, changed the formulation of materials used in the seal or gasket for the 2003 model year, Boyd said. After the filters were installed in the Japanese and British factories that build the CR-V, zinc in the rubber gaskets reacted with temperature and humidity changes as the vehicles were shipped across the ocean to the United States, “blooming” or rising to the surface and causing the material to become sticky, he said.

SHELL VISOR

# Japan corporations lag in promoting women

**TOKYO (AP)**—When Ginko Sato landed her first job in the 1950s, the only person who genuinely welcomed her was the other woman in her office, a secretary who was relieved she would have help serving tea to colleagues and guests.

Sato has come a long way since then—she’s now on the board of directors at Hitachi Ltd., one of Japan’s top electronics manufacturers. But few other women in Japanese society have advanced as far. Sato is one of just two female board members at the 27 Japanese companies that are members of Fortune’s Global 200 list.

Sato blames old-style thinking that she says remains entrenched in the corporate culture of the world’s second-largest economy.

“People in management positions are all middle-aged men who can’t get beyond their old-fashioned thinking,” said Sato, a soft-spoken 70-year-old. “They don’t want to use women who, they fear, will get dragged down by family commitments. Given equal ability, they’d rather go with a man.”

The life stories of Sato and Sakie T. Fukushima, a board member at electronics and entertainment giant Sony Corp., underscore how difficult it has been for women to advance at Japanese companies and how only a select few, with outstand-

ing education, talent and drive, can hope for success.

A survey released in October by Corporate Women Directors International, a U.S. nonprofit organization that promotes the participation of women on global boards, found Japan ranked at the bottom of the list among nations with female board representation at Fortune Global 200 companies.

The survey mentioned a third woman board member at Nippon Life Insurance Co. But Shigemi Kanamori, whose name sounds female, turned out to be a man. That translates to less than 1 percent representation.

The United States led the list with 17.5 percent of board seats held by women. All 78 U.S. companies in the Global 200 have at least one female board member, led by grocery store chain Albertson’s Inc. with 50 percent female representation.

But even after reaching the pinnacle of business power, woman board members still face inequalities in Japan.

Both Fukushima and Sato, for example, are external board members. That would be a plus in the United States and many countries, where independent non-executive directors are

the norm. But it’s a minus in countries such as Japan where “inside” directors, or senior management that rose up within the ranks of the company, wield far more power, according to the Corporate Women Directors International survey.

For the most part, Japanese women executives tend to have started their own companies or are restricted to lesser companies, including retailers, cosmetics and food companies and other services—at least for now.

Job-hopping, which could have been a boon for ambitious women, is still relatively rare at Japan’s major companies, where employees are

groomed over decades for executive posts.

Japanese women, increasingly hired since the 1980s after legislation ensuring sexual equality in employment, are only recently starting to move up the corporate ladder.

“Companies are trying to add female board members because they need diversity. But that doesn’t really mean the position of women has improved. It’s an important step. But women who’ve risen internally within the company have to start joining boards,” said Fukushima, 55, who is regional managing director for Japan at Korn/Ferry International, a U.S. executive-recruitment company.

Just a few years ago, Fukushima’s clients were skeptical about the ability of women to

command respect in the male-dominated world of Japanese business, she recalls. These days, they recognize that women have the talent, she said.

There’s no question Sato and Fukushima are both extraordinary women.

But each took a different approach in overcoming the obstacles of a sexist society: Sato armed herself with a nationally recognized credential; Fukushima shaped her career at American companies.

When Sato graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1958, she couldn’t even apply for a job in the private sector. Those jobs were closed to women. So she became a career bureaucrat to get her foot in the door.

The only ministry then hiring women was the Labor

Ministry—only because it had orders from the U.S. Occupation after World War II to do so. Sato eventually rose to assistant minister and was appointed ambassador to Kenya in 1991.

Fukushima, meanwhile, was educated at Harvard and Stanford, in addition to her schooling in Japan, and started as a Japanese instructor at Harvard.

The network of acquaintances she acquired through her campus life and her husband, Glen S. Fukushima, a California native and former deputy assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Japan and China who now is co-president and representative director at NCR Japan Ltd. Those contacts were key to her moving smoothly through job hops from consultant to executive-search expert.

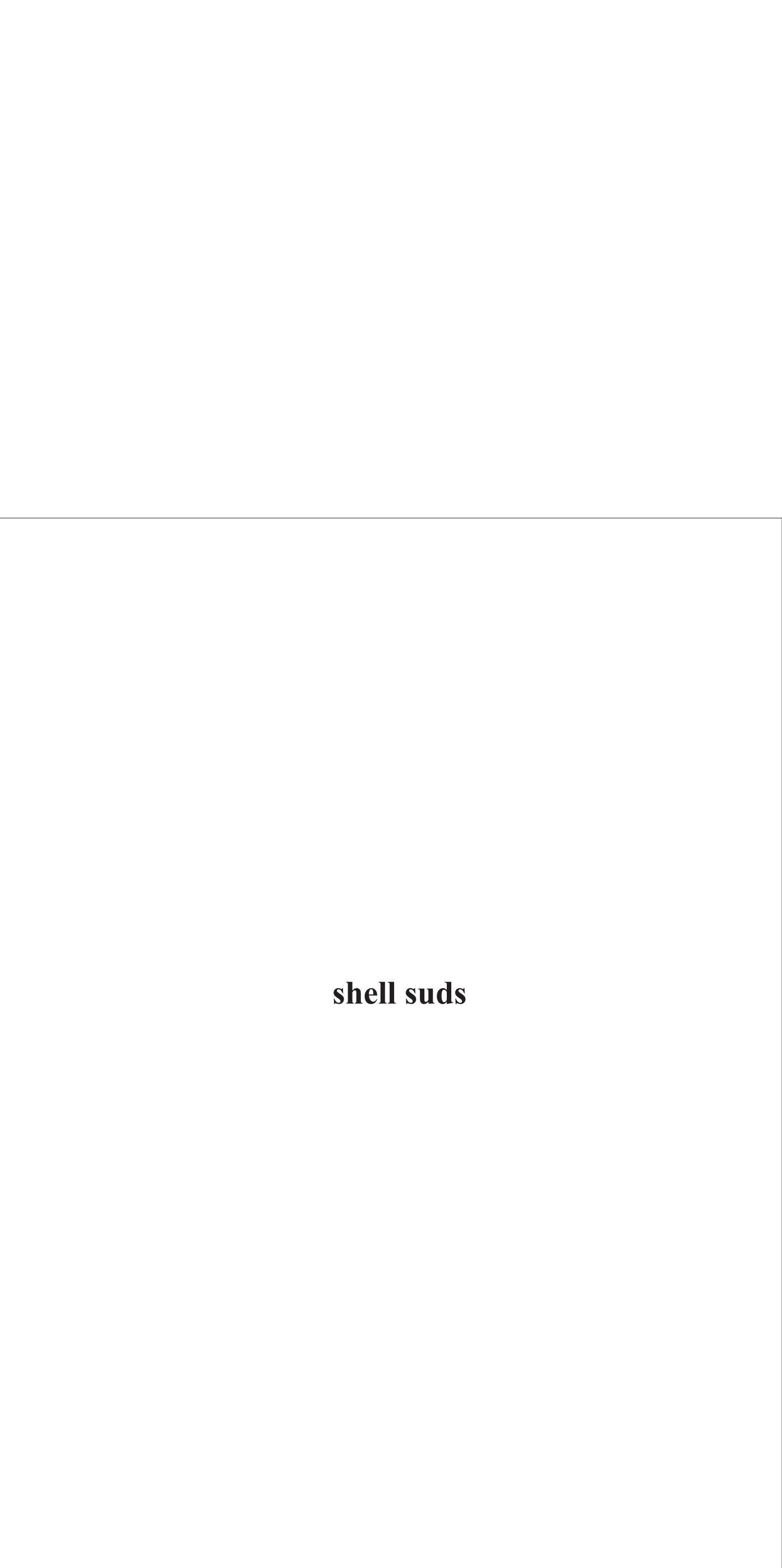


Fukushima

60th commemoration

SHELL STAMP





JOETEN MOTORS  
+BLUE/RED

# Five suspects in Philippine blast arrested

**MANILA, Philippines** (AP)—Five suspects in a bombing that killed at least 14 people at a southern Philippine market have been arrested with explosives in their possession, military officials said Thursday.

Military spokesman Lt. Col. Buenaventura Pascual said two women and three men were ap-

prehended Wednesday in General Santos, where Sunday’s bombing also wounded 70 people.

Authorities recovered from them a mortar, a blasting cap, a hand grenade, electrical wire, C-4 plastic explosives and a pack of an unknown white powder, the officials said.

Col. Alfredo Cayton, the area

brigade commander, said one of the suspects was identified by a witness as a bomber.

He refused to elaborate, and it wasn’t immediately clear if the suspects belong to any terrorist organization. He said authorities have “a solid lead” and that divulging details “might compromise our ongoing operation.”

National police chief Edgar Aglipay said investigators were looking into the possibility that a dispute between two groups wrangling over a market stall may have led to the bombing, but the involvement of militant groups hasn’t been discounted.

“We are following all leads including the business rivalry

(angle),” Cayton said. “Although we have the suspects, we are interrogating them to determine the actual motive.”

The investigation in General Santos, about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) south of Manila, is also being helped by Australian police, said senior police inspector Maximo Sebastian.

A police report said high explosives, possibly TNT, were used in the attack.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo promised a swift investigation into the bombing, which shattered a months-long lull in bomb attacks in the country’s volatile south, where Muslim insurgents have been fighting for a separate homeland.

# Philippines, UN appeal for aid to help disaster victims

**MANILA, Philippines** (AP)—The Philippines and international aid groups appealed Wednesday for donations to help millions Filipinos rebuild their homes and ward off disease following a series of deadly storms.

The northeastern Philippines was battered by four typhoons and tropical storms that began late last month and came in rapid succession, killing more than 1,000 people and leaving 566 others missing, the Office of Civil Defense said.

“The sudden mudslides and flash floods have robbed families of the homes and possessions they have spent a lifetime to build up,” said Senator Richard Gordon, head of the Philippine Red Cross.

The Philippines, the United Nations and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called Wednesday for about US\$10 million (€7.51 million) in aid as the World Health Organization warned that some 3.6 million people were threatened by diseases such as malaria and diarrhea.

“The priority now, from WHO’s perspective, is to safeguard the health of survivors and to rehabilitate public health services. This task will demand considerable funds and great commitment from all involved,” said Dr. Jean-Marc Olive, the WHO’s representative in the Philippines.

The civil defense office said the Philippines has received about 58.7 million pesos (US\$1.05 million, €788,870) from foreign donors.

# Manila to become world’s 12th biggest city by 2010

**MANILA, Philippines** (AP)—The Philippine capital Manila is expected to climb from the 16th to the 12th largest city in the world by 2010, officials and a U.N.-funded report said Wednesday.

The State of the Philippine Population Report 2004—prepared by the Commission on Population and funded by the U.N. Population Fund—also forecast that the Philippines will be 65 percent urbanized by 2020, up from 48 percent in 2000.

The UNPF said in 2000 Metro Manila ranked 16th on a list of the top 20 megacities in the world, with 10.9 million people.

Based on current trends and projections, Metro Manila will be the 12th largest city in the world by 2010, said Commission on Population Executive Director Tomas Osias. By 2015, the population is expected to total 14.8 million.

Areas near Metro Manila and the central Philippines’ Metro Iloilo have displayed a “spill-over effect,” where contiguous regions become “metro shadows,” the report said.

“Recent studies show that while more people troop to urban areas, the core cities themselves are becoming too congested and thus, less appealing,” the report said. “Recent data confirm that smaller towns and citizens are starting to grow faster than the larger ones.”

With the Philippine’s current population at 84 million and growing yearly by 1.8 million, local governments face increasing problems with sanitation, pollution, transportation, and peace and order, the report said.



## Arroyo declares Christmas cease-fire

**MANILA, Philippines** (AP)—President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo announced Wednesday a three-week cease-fire with communist rebels during the Christmas season.

The government and the communist New People’s Army traditionally separately declare a unilateral suspension of hostilities during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

In ceremonies to honor Filipino workers overseas, Arroyo said the cease-fire will start on Thursday and end on Jan. 5.

There was no immediate response from the rebels.

The government and the communist-led National Democratic Front have been holding on-and-off talks to end 35 years of insurgency since 1992, but the two sides have not agreed to a long-term truce, resulting in sporadic firefights between guerrillas and soldiers around the country.

## ADB warns of instability unless RP tackles budget deficit

**MANILA, Philippines** (AP)—The Asian Development Bank warned Wednesday that the Philippines could face economic instability unless it tackles its growing budget deficit and improves revenue collection.

The regional bank said despite moderate growth in recent years, averaging 4.7 percent to 5.7 percent, unemployment remains high and investments have faltered as the deficit, projected at 197.8 billion pesos (US\$35 billion; €26 billion) this year, hampers higher growth rates.

“The grave fiscal situation—caused mainly by weak revenue mobilization—dominates macroeconomic management and, if not urgently addressed, has the potential to cause economic instability,” ADB country director Thomas Crouch and economist Xuelin Liu said in the bank’s annual economic review for the Philippines.

TOWNHOUSE  
+RED/GREEN



# US says it has 6 open Afghan abuse cases

**KABUL, Afghanistan** (AP)—The U.S. military said Wednesday it has at least six open cases of prisoners who died in custody in Afghanistan dating back to 2002, but claimed it has taken steps to ensure against abuse of detainees.

Amid the fallout over abuse of prisoners in Iraq, Brig. Gen. Charles Jacoby Jr. was dispatched in May to examine treatment of current detainees at the two U.S. prisons and 20 “field holding sites” in Afghanistan. His report, which is still under review with no time set for release, found no evidence of abuse, Maj. Mark McCann told a news conference Wednesday in Kabul.

However, the report does not examine earlier incidents, including the deaths of prisoners, and The Washington Post has reported that Jacoby found many shortcomings, including inadequate enforcement of approved interrogation rules.

“We can’t go back and change the past,” McCann said. “What we can do is ensure that there are conditions in place now for in the future, where we ensure that this stuff will not happen again.”

Pentagon officials earlier this week put the number of prisoner deaths in Afghanistan that have been investigated since mid-2002 at eight, a higher number than previously reported.

McCann said three of the fatalities remain under investigation and three are pending judicial disposition. One case is complete, but he would not provide details. He did not know the status of the eighth.

He would not say how many detainees U.S. forces are holding in Afghanistan and declined media requests to visit the detention facilities, saying it would violate Geneva Convention rules on treatment of prisoners of war.



## Japan to issue visa for ex-Taiwan leader

**TOKYO** (AP)—Japan plans to issue a visa for former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to visit Japan this year, Japanese media reported Thursday, citing a foreign ministry official.

Lee would be allowed into Japan for the first time since he paid a visit to receive treatment for a heart condition in 2001, a Japanese Foreign Ministry official was quoted as saying by the Kyodo News agency.

Lee reportedly wants to come to Japan for a sightseeing trip with his family.

If confirmed, the decision could add to tensions between Japan and China. Relations between the two Asian powers eroded over the incursion in Japanese waters by a Chinese submarine last month.

## Koizumi fears Iraq becoming terrorist hub

**TOKYO** (AP)—Japan’s prime minister said Wednesday that Tokyo needed to keep its troops in Iraq to prevent the country from becoming a “hub for terrorists.” The deployment is Japan’s most dangerous military mission since World War II.

Japan has some 550 non-combat soldiers in southern Iraq to purify water and rebuild infrastructure. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s Cabinet last week voted to extend their mission for another year, citing the need to stabilize the Middle Eastern country.

In an interview with CNN in Tokyo, Koizumi said Japan had a responsibility to help out in Iraq because it owed its own prosper-

ity to world peace and stability.

“We should never allow Iraq to turn into a hub for terrorists,” Koizumi told the network.

## Moderate earthquake shakes eastern Taiwan

**TAIPEI, Taiwan** (AP)—A moderate earthquake jolted eastern Taiwan on Thursday, the Central Weather Bureau said, but no damage or injuries were reported.

The magnitude 5.2 quake’s epicenter was under the Pacific Ocean, about 40 miles east of the city of Hualien, according to the weather bureau.

Hualien is 90 miles southeast of the capital, Taipei.

Quakes frequently rattle Taiwan, but most are minor and cause little or no damage. However, a magnitude 7.6 earthquake in central Taiwan in September 1999 killed more than 2,300 people.

## Wife of late Taiwanese leader dies at 88

**TAIPEI, Taiwan** (AP)—Faina Chiang, the shy Russian-born wife of former Taiwanese President Chiang Ching-kuo, died on Wednesday at 88.

She was suffering from asthma when she died at the Veterans’ General Hospital in Taipei, the state-funded Central News Agency reported. Cable TV stations showed political leaders going to the hospital to pay their respects.

The widow—also known by her Chinese name Chiang Fang-liang—had been seriously ill for years and used a wheelchair during her rare public appearances.

The leader of her late husband’s Nationalist Party, Lien Chan, said she died “peacefully” shortly after noon.

# Body of Turk engineer found in Afghanistan

**KABUL, Afghanistan** (AP)—The latest abduction of a foreigner in Afghanistan—a Turkish engineer working on a U.S.-sponsored road project—ended when the kidnappers killed him, apparently so he wouldn’t slow them down with police hot on their trail.

Eyup Orel worked for Serhat, a Turkish subcontractor for the U.S.-based Louis Berger Group, company vice president Tom Nicastro said. Earlier this year, an Australian pilot working for Berger was killed when a man raked his helicopter with AK-47 fire.

Orel’s body was found on a mountainside by security forces who were searching for him, said Jamil Jumbesh, head of the Interior Ministry’s anti-terror division.

There was no immediate claim

of responsibility. Bandits and insurgents from the Taliban and other Islamic extremist groups operate in the area about 110 miles east of the capital, Kabul.

President Hamid Karzai condemned the killing and said he ordered security agencies “to use any means possible” to bring the kidnappers to justice. “I am angered that the enemies of Afghanistan have killed a brother and fellow Muslim in pursuit of their goal of disrupting reconstruction in Afghanistan.”

The U.S. Embassy said it was “angered and saddened” by the death.

“The enemies of Afghanistan are again trying to harm and intimidate those who are committed to helping Afghanistan,” an embassy statement said. “This cowardly act will not deter U.S.

resolve to help Afghanistan stand on its feet.”

Orel was shot six or seven times in the head and torso, Kunar provincial police chief Mateullha Sofie said, adding that it appeared the kidnappers killed him to move faster, abandoning his body high on a mountain as police moved in.

The kidnappers managed to escape, taking advantage of the rugged, forested terrain, Sofie said.

The body was found Wednesday morning by a search party of two dozen police and villagers, who carried it to lower ground, Sofie said. A helicopter was brought in to evacuate the body.

Orel’s driver and interpreter said 12 armed men wearing military-style uniforms stopped their car Tuesday afternoon as they were traveling from the road

project in Kunar province to the city of Jalalabad, where they have been staying. Police found the car abandoned. The Afghan driver and interpreter were held briefly.

The kidnappers later exchanged gunfire with police manning a nearby security post on the road, and one police officer was wounded.

Security, particularly in the countryside, is one of the top priorities for Karzai ahead of parliamentary elections in the spring.

In March, Afghan forces freed two kidnapped Turkish engineers and an Afghan translator in a shootout that left their two captors dead and two Afghan soldiers injured. Another Turkish engineer and an Afghan soldier were killed during the abduction a week earlier on the road from Kabul to the south.

ICONNECT  
CMYK









## World

# Suicide bomber said cause of Iraq attack

**BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)**—The U.S. military said Wednesday that a suicide bomber likely carried out the explosion at a U.S. base near Mosul, spraying a crowded mess tent with small pellets and killing 22 people—nearly all of them Americans.

The announcement raised questions about how the attacker infiltrated the base, which is surrounded by blast walls and barbed wire and guarded by U.S. troops. However, as in many other U.S. military facilities, Iraqis do a variety of jobs at the base, including cleaning, cooking, construction and office duties.

The apparent sophistication of Tuesday's operation—the deadliest single attack on U.S. troops since the war began—indicated the attacker probably had inside knowledge of the base's layout and the soldiers' schedule. The blast came at lunchtime.

"We have had a suicide bomber apparently strap something to his body ... and go into a dining hall," Gen. Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon. "We know how difficult this is to prevent people bent on suicide and stopping them."

Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, commander of the multinational force in Iraq, ordered an investigation. Troops found "no physical evidence of a rocket, mortar, or other type of indirect fire weapon," according to a statement issued early Thursday by military authorities in Baghdad.

There was little apparent sympathy for the dead Americans on Mosul's deserted streets, where hundreds of U.S. troops, backed up by armored vehicles and helicopters, blocked bridges and cordoned off Sunni Muslim areas of Iraq's third-largest city.

"I wish that 2,000 U.S. soldiers were killed," declared Jamal Mahmoud, a trade union official.

Initial reports said a rocket had ripped into the tent. Later, however, a radical Sunni Muslim group, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, claimed responsibility, saying it was a "martyrdom operation"—generally a reference to a suicide bomber.

Military officials in Iraq said Wednesday that shrapnel from the explosion included small ball bearings, which are often used in suicide bombings but are not usually part of shrapnel from rockets or mortars.

The attack sparked renewed concerns about the ability of U.S. troops and their Iraqi allies to secure elections Jan. 30. The military said they had expected an increase in violence as insurgents attempt to derail the vote for an assembly that will draft Iraq's new constitution.

"Insurgents, who have everything to lose, are desperate to create the perception that

elections are not possible," said Gen. George W. Casey, the commander of multinational forces in Iraq. "We will not allow terrorist violence to stop progress toward elections."

Mortar attacks on U.S. bases, particularly on the huge, white tents that serve as dining halls, have been frequent in Iraq for more than a year. Just last month, a mortar attack on a Mosul base killed two troops with Task Force Olympia, the main force responsible for security in northern Iraq.

Tuesday's blast wrecked the mess tent at Forward Operating Base Marez, a military camp for U.S. and Iraqi government forces just south of Mosul.

The 22 dead included 13 U.S. service members, five U.S. civilians, three Iraqi National Guard members, and one "unidentified non-U.S. person," the U.S. military command in Baghdad said Wednesday evening.

Myers said authorities don't know whether the unidentified person was the likely bomber.

Of the 69 wounded, 44 are members of the U.S. military, seven are U.S. contractors, five are civilian workers for the Defense Department, two are Iraqi civilians, 10 are contractors of other nationalities, and one is of unknown nationality and occupation, the statement said.

About 50 people—most of them injured soldiers from Mosul—arrived in Germany on Wednesday aboard an Air Force C-141 transport plane. As a light snow fell, some wounded were carried away on stretchers.

Halliburton Co. lost four American employees in the attack, the Houston-based contractor said. Sixteen other Halliburton workers, including 12 subcontractors, were injured seriously.

In the immediate aftermath of Saddam Hussein's ouster in April 2003, U.S. commanders cited Mosul—with a population of 1.2 million some 220 miles north of Baghdad—as a success story. But armed opposition has mounted, especially since last month's successful U.S.-led operation to retake the insurgent-held town of Fallujah.

Many insurgents apparently moved to Mosul, where guerrillas launched a coordinated surprise attack in November against police stations. The municipal police force, estimated at over 6,000 officers, disintegrated; despite the success of U.S. troops a few days later in re-establishing control, only part of the police force has returned to work.

On Wednesday, hundreds of U.S. troops blocked five bridges over the Tigris river, and patrols spread out through the mainly Sunni neighborhoods of Muthanna, Wahda and Hadabaa.

Although no curfew was proclaimed, an Associated Press



reporter said city streets were virtually deserted as personnel carriers and armored Humvees rumbled through.

Lt. Col. Paul Hastings, spokesman for Task Force Olympia, said the operation had been planned before Tuesday's attack. He said five of the bridges were closed to civilian traffic.

Workers and U.S. soldiers tend to the wounded after an apparent insurgent mortar attack on a dining facility during lunchtime on FOB Marez in Mosul, Iraq on Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2004.

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# French hostages go home, no ransom paid

**PARIS (AP)**—Two French journalists freed from a four-month hostage ordeal in Iraq came home Wednesday, saying they had feared for their lives—sometimes being moved bound and blindfolded in the back of a truck amid the sounds of nearby explosions—but had never lost hope.

Clean-shaven and wide-eyed, smiling and apparently healthy, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot walked off the plane at Villacoublay military airport outside Paris, through a chilly evening rain and into the arms of sobbing family members waiting on the tarmac.

President Jacques Chirac greeted the reporters, along with

several top Cabinet ministers.

“We’re fine,” said Malbrunot, his hair long and shaggy, at a brief news conference. “We lived through a difficult experience—sometimes very difficult—but we never lost hope.”

“It’s a very tough situation to be surrounded by people with guns and in masks,” said Malbrunot, describing how they were kept initially in a Baghdad suburb but then moved four times. When transported, they were put in the back of a truck, tied up and blindfolded with blankets over them. Sometimes, he said, they heard bombs exploding nearby.

Chesnot said they were never mistreated.

“The conditions were rather

good because we were not badly treated,” said Chesnot, who stuttered at times and appeared to have lost weight. He said they were initially fed a “tight diet.”

Chesnot, 38, of Radio France Internationale, and Malbrunot, 41, of the daily Le Figaro, disappeared Aug. 20 along with their Syrian driver as they headed to the city of Najaf. The driver, Mohammed al-Joundi, was freed in November and is now in France.

The reporters, who were released Tuesday, had been held by a group calling itself the Islamic Army of Iraq, which has killed other hostages.

The two men were deliv-

ered to the French Embassy in Baghdad, officials said, a release Malbrunot described as “unexpected.”



Chesnot



Malbrunot

“When I got out of the trunk of a Mercedes and I saw the French flag, I said to myself, ‘Finally, it’s over,’” he said.

The release was negotiated through intermediaries and no ransom was paid, Prime Min-

ister Jean-Pierre Raffarin told politicians, according to centrist leader Francois Bayrou.

“No concessions” were made, Raffarin told parliament, denouncing terrorism as “the adversary of democracy.”

The journalists were among more than 170 foreigners kidnapped in Iraq. More than 30 have been slain.

Chirac, in a brief address after the two men left Baghdad, expressed “personal joy and that of all French to know that they are finally free and soon home with us.” He cut short his Christmas holiday in Morocco after news broke of their release.

Chirac said France opposes

“all forms of terrorism” and that the reporters were freed by the government’s “responsible and tenacious action” as well as national solidarity that surrounded the hostage crisis.

The release unleashed a multitude of theories about why the men were freed.

The Arab broadcaster Al-Jazeera reported it received a statement from the Islamic Army of Iraq, saying the reporters were released after it was proven they were not U.S. spies and because of pleas made by Muslim groups and the French government’s stance toward Iraq.

“We told them we were not American,” Malbrunot said. “We immediately played the French journalist card.”

## Construction company let go of Iraqi contract

**WASHINGTON (AP)**—An international construction company has pulled out of its contract to rebuild Iraq’s transportation systems, deciding it was too dangerous to stay, a spokesman for the U.S.-led reconstruction effort said Wednesday.

Contrack International Inc. led a coalition of firms working on a \$325 million contract to rebuild Iraq’s roads, bridges and railways. Contrack withdrew from that contract last month after a surge in attacks on reconstruction efforts, said Lt. Col. Eric Schnaible of the Pentagon’s Project and Contract Office in Baghdad.

“It’s hard to do construction in a place where people are shooting at you or intimidating your work force,” Schnaible said in a telephone interview. “It’s a challenge across the country.”

The PCO has taken over management of about 18 sub-contractors working on transportation projects, Schnaible

said. He said Contrack’s pullout was “a mutually agreed-to separation” and does not signal a larger movement by U.S.-based companies to abandon Iraq.

“Some parts of the country are a whole lot more permissive than others,” Schnaible said. “Where we can get the work done, good things are happening.”

U.S. firms and their workers have been targets ever since they entered Iraq last year. Tuesday’s deadly attack on an Army dining hall near Mosul underscored the danger: Four of those killed were Americans working for the largest contractor in Iraq, Halliburton.

Workers for Iraq contractors have been killed by mortars, car bombs and gunfire. Some have been kidnapped and beheaded.

Contrack President Karim Camel-Toueg did not immediately return telephone messages left at the company’s Arlington, Va., offices Wednesday.

## Yushchenko says Ukraine election may be disrupted

**KIEV, Ukraine (AP)**—Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko praised thousands of his supporters Wednesday night, telling a roaring, orange-clad crowd that they changed the country without bloodshed—but he also warned of trouble during this weekend’s presidential runoff.

Yushchenko did not say who was plotting against Sunday’s court-ordered vote, but told supporters at a rally in Kiev that he was “calling on your courage to defend the results of the election.”

“The vote on Dec. 26 will not be an easy political walk,” Yushchenko said in freezing temperatures on Independence Square to mark one month since the beginning of the “orange revolution” protests. “There are

some forces preparing to disrupt and they are preparing brigades, groups who are readying to come to Kiev.”

“We will come on this square, this stage, after the vote on Dec. 26, and will stay until our victory is celebrated,” he said.

The call echoed an appeal he made after the Nov. 21 runoff that his rival Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich won until the Supreme Court annulled the vote, citing fraud. It ordered a new vote for Sunday.

For nearly three weeks, Independence Square was the scene of protests that paralyzed the government in this former Soviet republic. Protesters set up a sprawling tent camp on the tree-lined main street, bringing central Kiev to a halt.

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# AROUND THE WORLD

## Blair proposes Mideast conference

**RAMALLAH, West Bank** (AP)—British Prime Minister Tony Blair offered Wednesday to host a one-day Mideast conference in the new year to help rehabilitate the battered Palestinian Authority, encourage reform and serve as a bridge to renewed peace talks, stalled by four years of violence.

Blair, the highest-ranking visitor to the West Bank since Yasser Arafat’s death on Nov. 11, said a growing sense of hope must now be translated into action, while endorsing Israel’s precondition for peace talks—an end to Palestinian attacks—and the Palestinian goal of an independent state.

Wednesday was the first time Blair talked in public about his proposed London conference, considerably scaling down the expectations of many who expected a full-blown British Middle East peace push.

## Annan urges reassessment of Sudan efforts

**UNITED NATIONS** (AP)—Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on the U.N. Security Council Wednesday to urgently reassess its efforts to end nearly two-years of conflict and bloodshed in Sudan’s western Darfur region, saying the current approach isn’t working.

Both Annan and the council expressed deep concern Tuesday at the deteriorating security situation in the vast region where rebels and government-backed forces have repeatedly broken pledges to stop fighting and only 900 troops of a 4,000-strong African Union force have actually been deployed.

But the secretary-general went further Wednesday, saying “quite frankly our approach isn’t working.”

## Spain ends hearings in train bombing probe

**MADRID, Spain** (AP)—Spanish lawmakers probing the Madrid train bombings that killed 191 people earlier this year decided Wednesday to stop hearing testimony and start compiling a final report.

Meanwhile, authorities arrested three Moroccans they believe were part of a radical Islamic cell looking to buy explosives in a central European country for a terror attack in Spain, the Interior Ministry said.

Police arrested Majid Bakali, Mohamed Douha and Abdelkader Farhaoui in the northeastern towns of Sant Andreu de la Barca and Mollet de Valles before dawn Wednesday, the ministry said in a statement.

## Supreme Court postpones Pinochet ruling

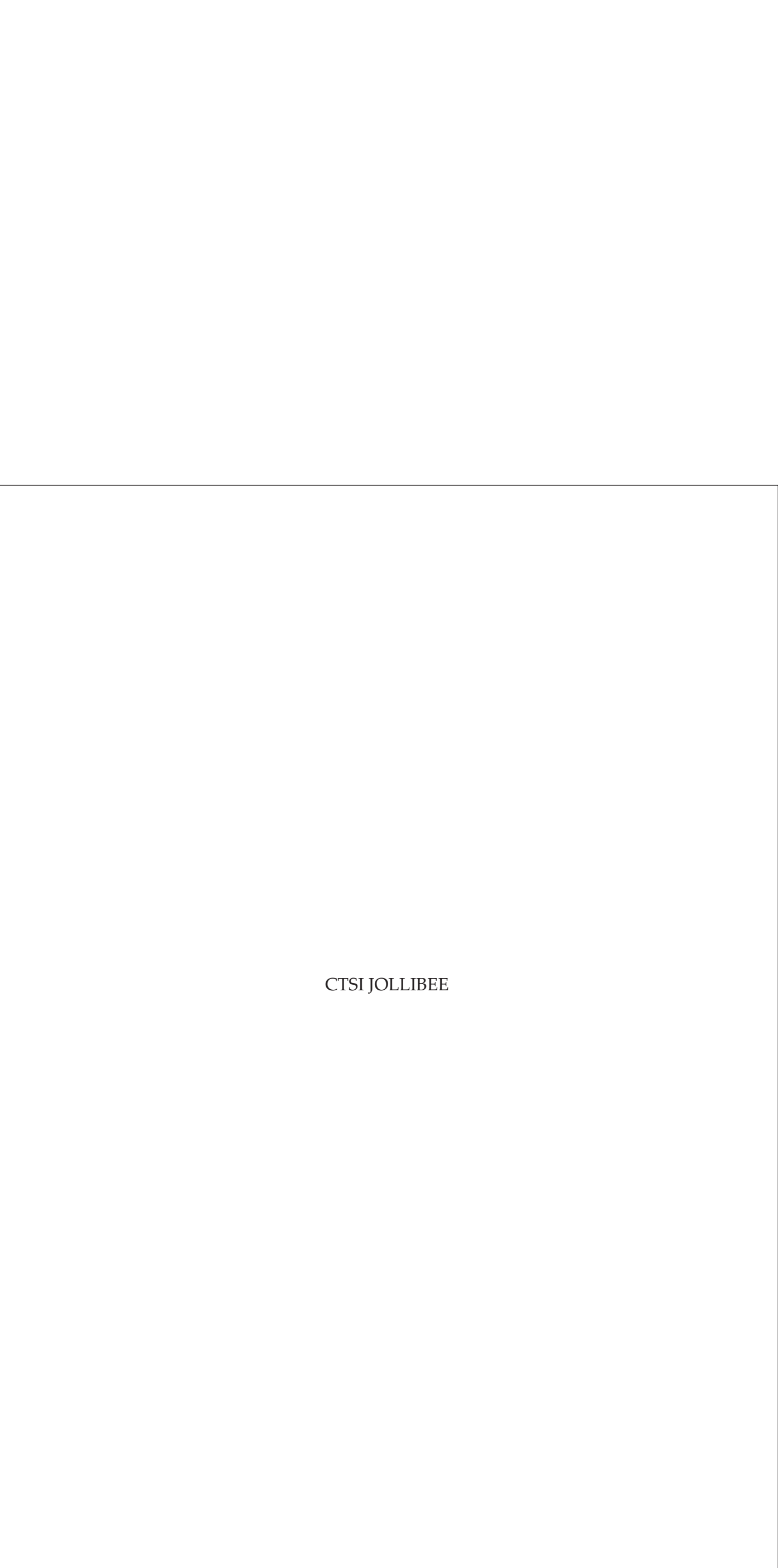
**SANTIAGO, Chile** (AP)—A defense lawyer for Augusto Pinochet argued to the Supreme

Court on Wednesday that the 89-year-old retired general’s health makes him unfit to stand trial on human rights charges, as Pinochet was released from the hospital after five days recovering from a stroke.

The prosecution insisted that Pinochet’s latest hospitalization was a maneuver to once again escape trial as the country’s highest court considers a defense appeal against a historic ruling by judge Juan Guzman last week indicting

the former dictator and ordering him put under house arrest. After three hours of arguments, the court delayed a decision in the case. No date has been set for a ruling, though one is expected by the end of the week.

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Life & Style

I shop, I wrap, and this is the thanks I get?

By ANNIE GROER  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Dear Aunt Martha,  
Thank you for the beautiful sweater. How did you know pink was my favorite color? I can't wait to see you and Uncle Dave when you visit at Easter. Every time I wear my beautiful sweater, I'll think of you.

Love, Peggy

Read those four sentences carefully and consider them a holiday gift. They illustrate the simple archi-

tecture of an all-purpose thank-you note—whether scrawled in pencil by a first-grader or penned with a Mont Blanc by a Fortune 500 CEO. This is the way to do it, declares Peggy Newfield, founder and president of the American School of Protocol in Atlanta, which trains adults to teach etiquette to children. In Newfield's universe, the Aunt Martha template requires that "the first and second sentences and fourth sentence are about the same thing"—to wit, the wonderful gift—and the third sentence is unrelated—it's about the benefactors.

Her lesson could not be more timely. 'Tis the giving season: Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year celebrations, holiday weddings and engagement parties. Though standards may have slipped precariously in these modern times, gift-givers and hosts can still become righteously offended by a recipient's failure to acknowledge generosity and hospitality. "Thank-you notes make all the difference between feeling grateful and showing your gratitude," says Kate Spade, author of a slim new etiquette book,

"Manners" (Simon & Schuster, 96 pp., \$20). The longtime note-writer—Spade's signature handbag collection was followed by a line of social stationery—credits Mom with raising her right. "Every Christmas without fail, my mother gave me stationery," then "hounded me" until all the thank-yous were written, she says. Once one is beyond the reach of parental prodding, the specter of having to pick up pen and commit grateful prose to paper can paralyze some respondents for months. The same prospect can deeply

irk others, who consider the social nicety an outmoded act of institutional insincerity. Yet the practice of expressing thanks in writing is on the rise, according to those in the correspondence industry. "Things became so informal," says Rachel Bolton, a spokeswoman at Hallmark Cards. "But now there is a counter-trend in a return to etiquette. ... More than 80 percent of people think a handwritten note is the best way to say thank you for a gift." At Crane and Co., a leading stationery manufacturer based in Dalton, Mass., sales of pre-printed thank-you cards have enjoyed "high, significant double-digit growth over the last two years," says Anita Brady, vice president of the social stationery division. Personalized note cards and paper are enjoying a resurgence, and sales of etiquette books are "exploding." Surprisingly, Brady credits e-mail, so often blamed for the decline of personal correspondence, for easing millions of people into the thank-you note habit. "E-mail made a lot of people who would not put something in writing into writers," she says. "They send e-mails that might not look pretty, but they have to use the written word, and we think it has taken away that hurdle of sitting down and saying, 'Oh, what am I going to write?'" Still, there is that little matter of getting into the habit of actually writing a thank-you note. The Emily Post Institute, run by descendants of America's most famous etiquette adviser, suggests that parents "make it fun. If you view this as drudgery, so will your child." The lesson to drive home is "receiving thank-you notes makes people feel good. And it lets them know that the gift arrived safely and is appreciated," counsels the institute Web site, www.emilypost.com. One woman earned Post plaudits for staging a family thank-a-thon at the kitchen table every January. She assembles pens, pencils, crayons, stationery, stamps, lists and addresses. Little ones draw pictures, older children write a few sentences, Mom and Dad help with spelling and envelope addressing. When everyone is done, out come the cookies and cocoa. Frequent note-writers recommend putting pen to paper the night of, or morning after, a dinner or a weekend stay at a friend's home, when memories are still fresh and those few sentences will sound conversational and genuine. Multi-taskers advise keeping note cards and pre-stamped envelopes in the office, the glove compartment, the purse or briefcase to take advantage of short bursts of down time. Once you sit down to write a thank-you note, there are con-

flicting etiquette edicts to sort out. We talked to a half-dozen "experts" in etiquette and the stationery industry, and consulted another half-dozen books and Web sites to determine the "correct" way of doing things. Gray areas remain. □ Must a thank-you be handwritten, or will a phone call suffice? (A note is called for if the gift arrived by mail or you've been the guest of honor at a party. A phone call will do if you've been one of several guests at an event.) □ How about e-mail? (A last resort.) □ If you have thanked someone in person when opening a gift, must you also write? (Not necessarily. Let your conscience, and the gift's extravagance or rarity, be your guide. Shower and wedding gifts, however, always require notes.) □ How soon should a recipient express written thanks for a gift or other kindness? (Up to a week is all right, but three days is better.) □ Is there more leeway for brides? And let's be clear: Women still write the bulk of notes for gifts given to couples. (Two weeks to a year, depending on the size of the wedding, according to several etiquette consultants and bridal Web sites.) □ Should condolence cards, flowers and other expressions of sympathy be acknowledged? (Yes, preferably in writing, despite the availability of pre-printed thank-you cards from funeral homes.) Wait, there's more. Some protocol purists insist notes be written only in dark ink on pale, personalized stock—folded note paper for women, flat correspondence cards for men and, increasingly, women. But millions of Americans send and receive cards pre-printed with a cheery "Thank You!" on the front. (Never mind that it may be considered redundant because the first two words of the note should also be "thank you.") While etiquette experts invoke the "better late than never" maxim, one Washington-area bride—who asked that her name not be used to avoid mortifying her in-laws—may have pushed the envelope, literally. Around week 49 of her own one-year deadline, she sought help acknowledging 15 gifts from people on the bridegroom's side who didn't know the bride—much less her handwriting. Because the notes "would never get done" if left to the groom, she composed three sample texts and made a list of people and the gifts they gave to the Mr. and Mrs. In return for a burrito lunch, a friend with lovely penmanship rescued the not-so-newlywed. Dear Total Stranger, Thank you for the beautiful fondue pot.

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# When wrapping gifts, remember: presentation matters

By ANNIE LINSKEY  
THE BALTIMORE SUN

Whether you purchased perfect holiday gifts months ago or you are palming off household bric-a-brac as presents this year, keep this in mind: the way the item is wrapped matters.

In fact, the cheaper the item, the more important it is to show that time and care was considered with the packaging.

“When you give a gift, it is more than handing something to someone and saying ‘I spent money on you,’” says Melanie Nerenberg, marketing director at Kate’s Paperie, a New York-based paper boutique.

“The fact is that the gift is diminished if the wrapping is lacking. You haven’t really given something if you haven’t seen it all the way through.”

But how does one achieve the proper amount of style? We solicited suggestions from Jodi Ceglia of Ellicott City, Md., founder of Wit and Whimsey Designs, a Web-based wrapping paper design company, and Ellen Timberlake-Volz, who estimates that she wrapped roughly

22,000 gifts when she owned a store in Arlington, Texas that was dedicated to wrapped gifts. Both are past winners of 3M’s Most Gifted Wrapper contest.

□ Find beautiful paper. Master gift wrappers will be able to turn butcher’s paper into a splendid creation. But, for the rest of us, stunning, handmade paper does the trick nicely. Look in local art stores, use scrapbook paper or order paper online.

□ Tie a nice bow. For those of us who can hardly tie our shoes, the experts suggest wire-edged ribbon. Even the clumsy can make a fluffy cascading bow out of this stuff. Raffia is also pretty, but it can be tricky.

□ Accessorize. Dress up the bow with surprising accouter-

ments. Examples include pine cones, partially inflated balloons, fake fur and even live flowers. Use accessories to hint at the contents of the package; for example, tie a pair of wooden spoons to a kitchen-related gift, or stick a plastic rattle on the outside of a baby gift. These extra trinkets can be found anywhere from the Dollar Store to Pier 1.

□ Create a surprise. Even if you use the wrapping to hint at the contents of a package, wrapping is still about anticipation. Disguise a wine bottle with more than a gift sack — put it in a flat box stuffed with tissue paper. Timberlake-Volz famously created a giant aluminum candy cane as wrapping for a set of golf clubs. She shops for wrapping ideas at Home Depot—particularly for large items.

□ Recycle. “Re-gifting” is a no-no, but re-gift-wrapping is a different story. Even if the actual paper is too crinkled to reuse, it is fine to snag the ribbon and bow or reuse a fabulous gift bag with fresh tissue paper.

□ Get organized. A gift wrapping kit should include a pair of sharp scissors, double-sided tape, a glue gun and a long piece of string in addition to the paper and bows. The string is a helpful way to measure the size of the package so that you can cut paper to the correct size the first time. Start wrapping only after you have gathered all of the tools and have a clean, firm surface for your work.

□ Be happy. Be in a good mood when you get ready to wrap. Prepare a cup of tea. Savor it. Put on some music. Those who attempt to pull a gift together 10 minutes before leaving the house will be sloppier and more disorganized. This shows.

□ Create crisp corners. The trick to clean corners is cutting the paper to the correct size.



This way excess paper won’t get in the way of a clean line when the sides are folded down.

□ Tape paper to the box. Do this for each fold. This way, the paper can be pulled tight and the package will look

crisp and starched.

□ Plan ahead for next year. Stores put wrapping paper on sale after the holiday season. This won’t help much for Christmas 2004 ... but there is always next year.

athletes foot

# 'Friends' lawsuit takes on tradition

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Writer Janis Hirsch faced a painful ritual at one sitcom: She'd get a tap on the shoulder from one or another male colleague, turn around and find them exposing themselves.

"You learn to laugh with it even if it steals your soul," she says.

Television shows, especially comedies, are created in an often brutal atmosphere. "It's one of the few places on earth where everybody says exactly what's on their minds," says veteran writer Dennis Klein. "It's as dark and nasty as possible."

But if the tradition of the raucous, freewheeling "writers room" is the Hollywood status quo, Amaani Lyle is fighting it. The 31-year-old former writer's assistant for "Friends" has filed a lawsuit that has landed before the California Supreme Court.

Lyle alleges the raw sexual remarks that peppered writers' work sessions and conversations added up to harassment, even though they weren't aimed directly at her or other women in the room.

Her suit, which also alleges demeaning remarks were made about blacks and constitute racial harassment, names "Friends" producers Warner Bros. Television Productions and Bright Kauffman Crane Productions, as well as writers Adam Chase, Greg

Malins and Andrew Reich.

Lyle worked for four months in 1999 before she was told she was a poor typist and fired. But Lyle, who is black, claims she was let go after pressing for black characters on the sexually charged NBC comedy about six pals in New York. It ended a successful 10-year run last season.

Her suit has galvanized the entertainment industry and news organizations, who argue it could imperil professional freedom of speech. Lyle supporters say workplace anti-discrimination laws will be undermined if the defense prevails.

The state Supreme Court will decide whether the lawsuit, dismissed in 2002 by a Superior Court judge and then reinstated in part last April by an appellate court, can go to trial. Briefs are being submitted now and the case may come before the high court next summer.

Warner Bros. admits that some, but not all, of the sexually explicit talk Lyle is alleging did take place, said attorney Adam Levin, who represents the defendants. But that's not the point, he said. The banter was a vital part of the creative process, Levin contends, and Lyle had been warned about sexually explicit discussions.

"California law does not prohibit discussions of sex in the workplace," Levin said.



TV writer Janis Hirsch poses at her home with her dog, Sophie, in Los Angeles, Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2004. When Hirsch heard of a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by a former writer's assistant on "Friends" over crass jokes and comments made by male writers, sympathy wasn't her first reaction. "We'd all be in jail," she recalls thinking. Television shows are created in an atmosphere that can be exhilarating, and even brutal, and being part of the club means accepting that, she said.

"The law prohibits targeted discriminatory harassment, such as demands for sexual favors."

He flatly denied Lyle's claims that the writers made sexual comments about cast members including Jennifer Aniston, David Schwimmer and Courteney Cox Arquette.

For writers, professors or news reporters whose jobs might

involve discussion of delicate issues including sex, restraints on speech would be a First Amendment violation, he said.

But Lyle's attorney, Scott O. Cummings, contends the graphic discussion of writers' sexual preferences and experiences amounted to a hostile work environment. He said the defendants are trying to duck responsibility by hiding behind free speech protections.

"It's ridiculous to say this had

anything to do with the creative process," he said.

Lyle, now serving with the Air Force in Europe, was unavailable for comment.

Both sides have their supporters.

"We shouldn't be exempting certain industries and segments of our workplace from these laws," says Elizabeth Kristen, project director for the Legal Aid Society's Employment Law Center in San Francisco. "If you exempt the

studios, other industries might claim that they need to have exemptions from discrimination laws and other laws."

The case raises an important question about the balance of creative freedom and workplace protection, says Erwin Chemerinsky, a Duke Law School professor.

"What's important here is that the workplace be open to everybody, that there not be a hostile workplace," he said, and a jury should be allowed to weigh whether the writers' remarks were necessary to storytelling.

But Crispin Sartwell, a writer ("Six Names of Beauty") who teaches at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Penn., says he's inclined to side with the "Friends" scribes and the cause of unfettered expression.

"The show was so concentrated on sexual titillation ... they're practically obliged to explore that," said Sartwell. "They're writing 'Friends,' for God's sake."

Members of the media, including Los Angeles Times Communications LLC and the American Society of Newspaper Editors, filed a friend of the court brief warning of a chilling effect on the exchange of ideas and information for newspapers and others if the suit prevails. The Writers Guild of America, west, Inc., argued in another brief that restrictions on the writing process would muzzle those who create all forms of entertainment.

## club jama

## Christmas at Rockefeller it wasn't

There resides within my family's annals an event about which no one speaks even now, but of which everyone is excruciatingly aware once the holidays call.

All families are haunted by such 500-pound Santa Clauses of Christmases Past. But in terms of raw emotion, abject fear and lingering rancor, it is doubtful many can surpass what those who know of it call: The Christmas Tree Chainsaw Massacre.

This story begins with a confession. I am not good at picking out Christmas trees. I end up feeling sorry for the sorriest of the lot, and invariably this is the one I bring home.

And, yet, despite this history, I was summoned on the morning of 18 December in the Year of Our Lord 1991 and dispatched by an admittedly overburdened spouse to secure a tree.

Recognizing the perils and pitfalls inherent in such an assignment, I immediately did what any logical person would do in this situation: I called my attorney.

Murphy was at my house within minutes, having nothing to do, seeing his wife was currently out—by herself, by choice—getting their tree. This should have sent up a red flag, but it didn't.

Off we went.

Relying on Murphy's advice, we quickly procured a tall, full, perfectly shaped tree, one the farmer remarked could have stood in Rockefeller Center.

It was only when we got back to the house and managed—after removing two sliding glass doors—to squeeze it into the family room that we realized the reason the tree was not standing in Rockefeller Center was prob-

By JIM SHEA  
The Hartford Courant

Shea is a columnist for  
The Courant.



ably because it was too large.

Upon giving due consideration to such options as simply decorating the tree as it lay, setting the tree up on an angle—The Leaning Tower of Christmas?—and/or cutting a hole in the ceiling, Murphy went into a rambling yet eloquent summation of our plight, concluding that we "whittle the beast down to size."

He then advised me to go get the chainsaw.

There are truly no words to accurately describe the look on a woman's face when she walks into her home to discover a chainsaw screaming, the air blue with oily smoke, wood chips flying like driven snow, and two men hard at work stacking branches on her 2-week-old rug.

A reaction similar to hysteria, only more wrought with emotion, followed. This, of course, caused Murphy to flee, mentioning as he retreated something about returning only under power of subpoena.

I thought the tree, which ended up being about 5 feet high and 8 feet across, looked pretty good once it was cabled to the banister and decorated, and I said so. The view was not, shall we say, shared.

Murphy advised me to never mention this tree again—and I haven't.



## Martha Stewart calls for sentencing reform

**NEW YORK (AP)**—Martha Stewart, in a Christmas message posted on her personal Web site, called Wednesday for sentencing reform and took a swipe at the “bad food” in prison.

Stewart, who is roughly halfway through a five-month sentence for lying about a stock sale, urged fans to think about the women she has met in prison who are “devoid of care, devoid of love, devoid of family.”

She suggested Americans should push for reforms in federal sentencing guidelines for nonviolent first-time offenders and particularly for drug offenders, who she said would be better served by rehabilitation than prison.

Stewart, who built a billion-dollar empire in homemaking, reported that her job at the federal prison camp in Alderson, W.Va., has been cleaning, including sweeping, vacuuming and raking leaves.

“I have had time to think, time to write, time to exercise, time to not eat the bad food and time to walk and contemplate the future,” she said.

Earlier this month, her company, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, announced Stewart would host a daytime talk show with a live studio audience beginning this fall.

The company has been working with reality TV pioneer Mark Burnett, and shares of the media company have soared since Stewart reported to prison—although they have fallen back somewhat in recent weeks.

Stewart is due to be released in early March from Alderson, then must spend five months confined to her home in Bedford, N.Y. The television show is scheduled to air after the five months of house arrest end.

Stewart and her former stockbroker, Peter Bacanovic, were convicted in March of lying about why Stewart unloaded shares of ImClone Systems Inc. stock in 2001, just before the price plunged. Both are appealing.

Later Wednesday, lawyers for Stewart filed new papers with the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, urging it to overturn her conviction. The appeals court is expected to hear the case early in 2005.

The new papers reinforced many of Stewart’s arguments—namely that prosecutors improperly implied she was accused of insider trading and that a government expert witness on ink analysis lied on the stand.

The appeals lawyers said the trial was “constitutionally infirm” and rejected prosecutors’ arguments that the convictions of Stewart and Bacanovic rested on overwhelming evidence.

Shares of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia Inc. closed up 40 cents, or about 1.5 percent, at \$27.64 on the New York Stock Exchange. They traded below \$9 before her sentencing in July.

# Jennifer Lopez’s ex-husband sues her



**LOS ANGELES (AP)**—An ex-husband of Jennifer Lopez sued her for alleged breach of contract, claiming he was wrongly fired as the manager of her restaurant in Pasadena.

Ojani Noa, a waiter who married Lopez in 1997, filed a lawsuit Tuesday in Superior Court. They met at a restaurant in Miami where he worked and were married for about a year.

Noa quit his job managing the Conga Room in Los Angeles in 2002 to take a job running Lopez’s new restaurant, Madres, and was told by her that she would not fire him

“without good cause or reason,” the lawsuit said.

Noa, who was paid \$1,000 a week, was fired six months after he started the job at Madres, which opened in April 2002, the lawsuit said. It wasn’t known why Noa was fired.

“Mr. Noa tried to call Ms. Lopez to find out what prompted this sudden change of events. His calls went unreturned,” the lawsuit said.

A phone call to Lopez’s publicist was not immediately returned.

Noa is seeking unspecified damages.

Jennifer Lopez arrives at the Noche De Ninos benefit in a Los Angeles, Ca. file photo from October 2, 2004.

AP

## Blake didn’t seem distressed, doctor says

**LOS ANGELES (AP)**—A doctor who heard Robert Blake calling out that his wife was bleeding and needed help testified Wednesday that he did not offer assistance because he thought the actor’s cries were insincere.

Dr. James Michael McCoy, a hospital administrator, was called to the stand by prosecutors after a medical examiner told the jury in Blake’s murder trial that it was unlikely Bonny Lee Bakley could have been saved after being shot through the cheek and shoulder as she sat in a parked car.

McCoy said he and a friend were walking nearby when they heard a man shouting for help and banging on the door of a home. McCoy did not know that the man was the famous actor.

“I heard a man’s voice calling, ‘Help, my wife is bleeding!’” McCoy said. “The first impression I had is it was not a call for help. I thought maybe this was a home-invasion robbery.”

The doctor said he steered his woman friend across the street to take shelter under a large tree because “personal safety was a concern. Something didn’t seem right.”

Deputy District Attorney Shellie Samuels asked McCoy if his response was due to the man’s demeanor.

“It didn’t have an element of distress,” McCoy said. “It

seemed more cajoling. I felt there was something wrong going on and it would be better to be safe rather than to be exposed.”

The 44-year-old Bakley, who had recently married Blake when tests showed he was the father of her baby daughter, was shot May 4, 2001, after dining at Vitello’s restaurant in Blake’s Studio City neighborhood.

Blake maintains he left Bakley in the car to go back into Vitello’s to retrieve a handgun he carried for protection and returned to find her bleeding in the car.

Blake, 71, is charged with murder, lying in wait and soliciting two stuntmen to murder Bakley. If convicted he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

McCoy said that within minutes he saw the man who had been shouting go into Vitello’s and then saw people run out of the restaurant and down the street toward a car.

On cross-examination by defense lawyer M. Gerald Schwartzbach, McCoy said that even then he still did not offer to help. He said he was told that a nurse was present and later was told that the man had a gun.

Asked why he did not think Blake’s cries were urgent, the wit-

ness said, “Intonation and context create the sense of urgency.”

“Isn’t it your view that people react in all kinds of ways to emergencies?” asked Schwartzbach.

“Yes, that’s correct,” McCoy said.

During the entire episode, as he watched paramedics arrive and saw Bakley’s body taken to an ambulance, McCoy said

he never told anyone that he was a physician.

“I thought if there was any indication I could render assistance I was available to do that,” he said.

The medical examiner, Dr. Jeffrey

Gutstadt, said his investigation of Bakley’s wounds indicated the shooter was more than 1 1/2 feet away, and that both wounds were fatal.

“It would not be an instantaneous death,” Gutstadt said, suggesting it would have taken three to 15 minutes for Bakley to die but there was little paramedics could do.

“It is unlikely that in this case they would have been able to save her life,” Gutstadt said.

Gutstadt said that the trajectory of both bullets, which went from right to left and slightly upward, made the shots more deadly than had they hit the victim straight on.



Blake

WALLACE



## Woman made right decision to cut mom out of her life

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

**DEAR ABBY:** From the time that my father left—I was 8—until I was thrown out of the house at 16, my mother was seriously emotionally abusive and neglectful. She frequently called me filthy names, made bizarre accusations that had no basis in truth, told me I was a “mistake,” threatened me, publicly humiliated and belittled me.



*Dear Abby*

I am now in my mid-20s and have had no contact with my mother for three years. My older brother is in denial about the abuse and insists that I forgive her and rebuild our relationship. He claims that she's sorry and she misses me.

I recently traveled back to my hometown and visited my mother. She treated me as though I were a stranger. Afterward, I felt that I could move on, knowing I had done the right thing in deciding to cut her out of my life. Now the rest of the family has turned their backs on me. I would like to maintain a personal relationship with them, but they think I'm a bad person for no longer having a relationship with my mother. Do you have any advice?

LEFT IN THE COLD IN DULUTH

**DEAR LEFT IN THE COLD:** Only this: If the price of having a relationship with your family is tolerating their emotional blackmail and more abuse from your mother, the price is too high.

**DEAR ABBY:** Not long ago, we moved into a beautiful new housing development. Neighbors on the street behind us keep their puppy penned up outside day and night in all kinds of weather. Occasionally we see one of their neighbors walk the dog, but other than that, it seems the dog's existence is limited to a cement pad covered in you-know-what.

We would rather not call the homeowners' association or the Humane Society, as these neighbors seem like decent people. However, it is upsetting our small children, as well as my husband and me, to hear the poor animal cry. We can't imagine spending the next 10 years like this. What do you recommend we do?

CANINE LOVERS IN CALIFORNIA

**DEAR CANINE LOVERS:** Although you would rather not, for the puppy's sake, pick up the phone and contact the homeowners' association and the Humane Society. You'll be doing the neglected creature—and yourselves—a favor. The owners of that poor animal have no idea how to properly care for a dog. The Humane Society will instruct them on the proper care of their furry family member.

**DEAR ABBY:** My 2-year-old is in a private home day care. Occasionally he makes a mess on the carpet or breaks a toy. When it happens, the day-care provider is quick to point out the price of the cleaning or replacement, and I usually offer her \$20 in compensation. However, she expects me to pay at least half for my child's accidents.

Since this is a private home, is it appropriate to assume I'll pay for these incidents on top of the weekly fee?

IN NEED OF DAY-CARE ETIQUETTE

**DEAR IN NEED:** The fees you pay the day-care provider should cover the cost of the toys—they are a part of her cost of doing business. It is interesting that your day-care provider has her charges playing on her carpets, and not in an area that is easier to keep clean and sanitized. Is this person a licensed and insured day-care provider? If she is not, it's time to give some serious consideration to what might happen if your child were injured on her property. Readers, what do you think of this?

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.*

*What teens need to know about sex, drugs, AIDS, and getting along with peers and parents is in "What Every Teen Should Know." To order, send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$5 (U.S. funds only) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included.)*

## Spears named top star of 2004

**NEW YORK (AP)**—"Access Hollywood" has named its "Top Ten Stars of 2004," with Britney Spears in the No. 1 spot. The rankings are based on the number of stories the syndicated entertainment television show aired on each star.

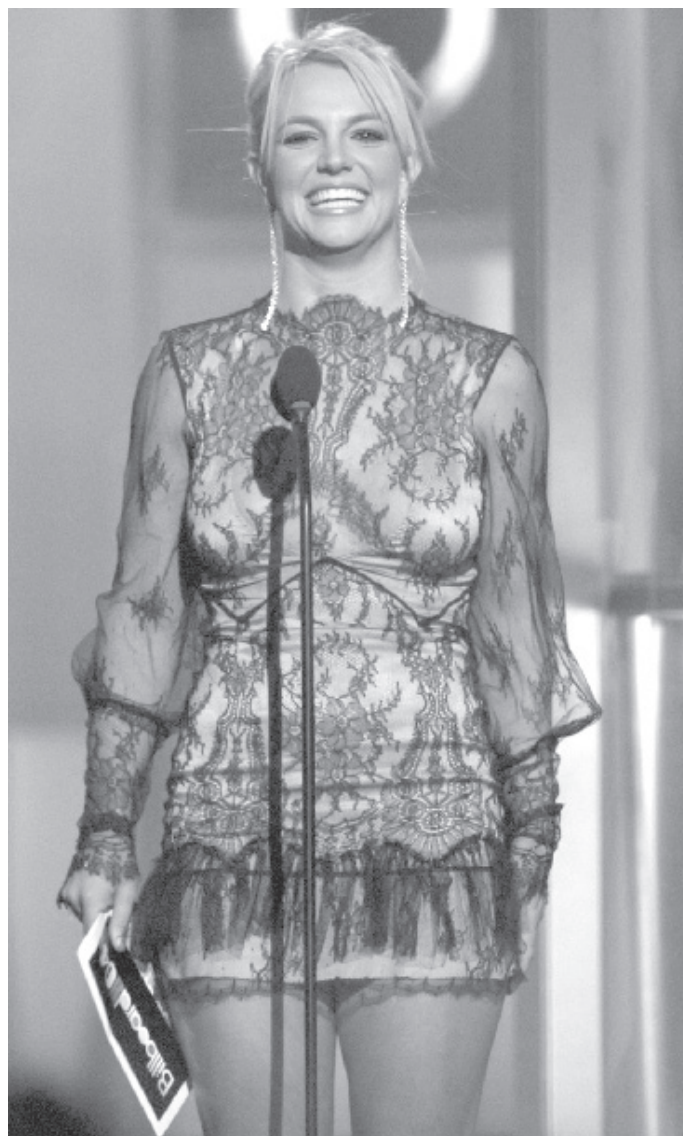
Spears—who was married twice, canceled a summer tour because of a knee injury and released a greatest hits album—topped the list with 119 stories.

Beyonce is in the No. 2 spot, with 102 stories, followed by Donald Trump, 94 stories; Michael Jackson, 84 stories; Tom Cruise, 72 stories; Jessica Simpson, 69 stories; Paris Hilton, 63 stories; Nicole Kidman, 62 stories; Jennifer Lopez, 54 stories; and Whitney Houston, 52 stories.

"We want to thank these stars for helping to make 2004 the best in 'Access Hollywood' history," executive producer Rob Silverstein said in a statement Tuesday. "Here's to more 'can't miss' moments in 2005."

Britney Spears appears as a presenter Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2004 during the Billboard Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

AP



## All things French in vogue for Allen

**PARIS (AP)**—In Woody Allen's America, Bordeaux or Burgundy wine and other things French are always in vogue. But he admits his European sensibility makes his films less popular back home.

Even with trans-Atlantic ties at a low ebb, the French are still seen as standard-bearers of class, elegance and, well, romance among Americans, he said, and the U.S. filmgoing public knows it.

"If you were doing a scene of seduction, and the man gets the woman in a candlelit restaurant, he would never order a California wine—because then everyone would laugh," Allen told reporters in Paris. "It will not be a Portuguese wine, it will just always be French."

"There's a mystique that Americans have about French wine," he said. "Despite any political conflicts America has with France, most Americans have enormous affection for thing French."

France's vocal opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq chilled relations between Paris and Washington, but Allen stopped short of any comment on the soured ties.

The bespectacled filmmaker



AP

U.S. actor and director Woody Allen holds the San Sebastian film festival's lifetime achievement award he received at the 52nd Film Festival in San Sebastian, Spain, Friday, Sept. 17, 2004.

was in Paris to promote his new film "Melinda and Melinda," which explores both tragedy and comedy through two separate and parallel lives of a young woman—each played by Radha Mitchell—that are the subject of a dinner conversation.

The film gave Allen the chance to dabble in trage-

dy—admittedly not his strong point. It is to be released next month in France and in the United States in March.

Allen said he liked Michael Moore's anti-Bush film "Fahrenheit 9/11"—which won top prize at the Cannes Film Festival this year—but insisted filmmakers face limits in changing political attitudes.

"I don't think that it made any real difference in the outcome of the election," Allen said of Moore's film. "It's no question that I was disappointed in the outcome of this election."

But "I don't think people see movies and say, 'Well, I'm going to go out there and now I'm going to vote for somebody different,'" Allen said.

Allen's films are wildly popular in countries like France, and he acknowledged that these days his penchant for European culture doesn't win him much favor in America.

"It's not surprising to me that all over, my films have some kind of European sensibility," he said. It "doesn't help their popularity in the United States—but it's unconscious."

## Stolen Black Sabbath discs retrieved

**LONDON (AP)**—Stolen gold and silver discs won by Ozzy Osbourne's band Black Sabbath were recovered after thieves dumped them behind trash cans.

The discs were reported missing last week after a burglary at the home of Osbourne's former manager Patrick Meehan, in Edenbridge,

Kent, southeast England.

Kent Police said an anonymous tip led them to the eight discs, found Wednesday in a plastic bag dumped behind recycling bins.

Two other discs stolen in the haul—which included the albums "Master of Reality," "Paranoid" and "Black Sabbath, Vol. 4"—had already been returned

after being offered for sale on Internet auction site eBay.

Osbourne, who earned fame as a heavy metal rocker in the 1970s, was a victim of burglars himself last month.

He unsuccessfully attempted to tackle thieves who broke into his Buckinghamshire mansion, west of London, and made off with valuable jewelry.

## MTV's 'The Real World' heads to Texas

**NEW YORK (AP)**—Dude! MTV's "The Real World" is headed to Austin, Texas. "We've been thinking about Austin for a long time," co-creator and executive producer Jon Murray told The Associated Press Wednesday.

"It's a great college town. It's a great music town. It's just a really young place. People go to college there and just don't want to leave," Murray said.

The show brings together seven strangers between the ages of 18 and 24 to live in a swanky loft or house and films them around the clock, at home and on the town.

The 16th season's seven cast members will start getting real in the Lone Star state early next year. The 24 episodes will begin airing in June.

Murray said Austin has long topped his list of places to strand the strangers. Other contenders included Washington, Atlanta, Denver, "somewhere in Montana" and Sydney, Australia.

"Austin has a small-town feel, but it has a lot of things going for it in terms of diversity and entertainment that make it feel metropolitan," Murray said.

Mayor Will Wynn said he's been "sworn to secrecy" about "The Real World" address.

"They were excited about coming to Austin and asked my help in understanding a little more about the city," Wynn said.

Murray also wouldn't say where the house is, and he was tightlipped on the identities of the seven strangers, though he said his casting staff did "a bit of an outreach to people returning from Iraq."

"We always look for a diverse cast," Murray told the AP. "The idea of someone who was in Iraq, well, that would certainly meet that criteria. Ultimately, we choose from people who apply."

Murray promised "The Real World" homestead in Austin would be just as unique and palatial as the pier in Seattle, the loft in New York, the mansion in New Orleans and the former bank in Philadelphia, the location of the latest season. There will be a hot tub, some antiques and maybe even some neon or cowboy kitsch from local stores. But don't expect a horse.

"In the past 16 seasons, the cast haven't done a good job taking care of fish so I don't know about a horse," said Murray.







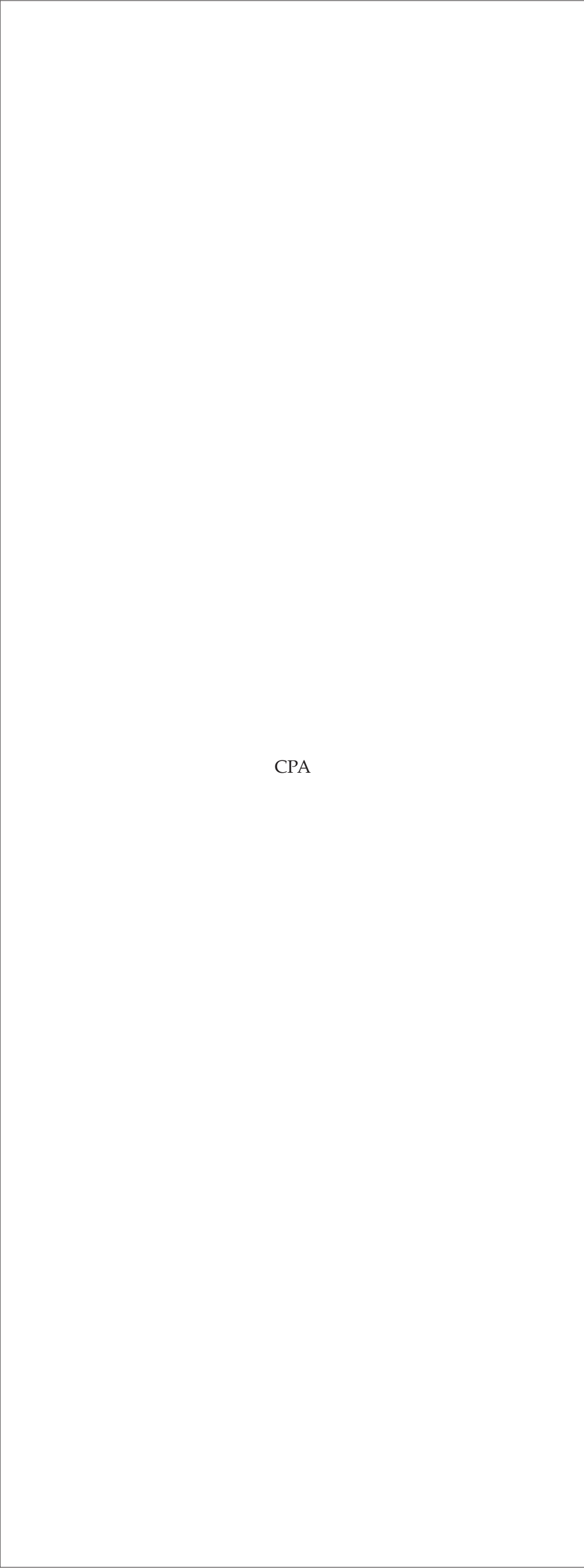
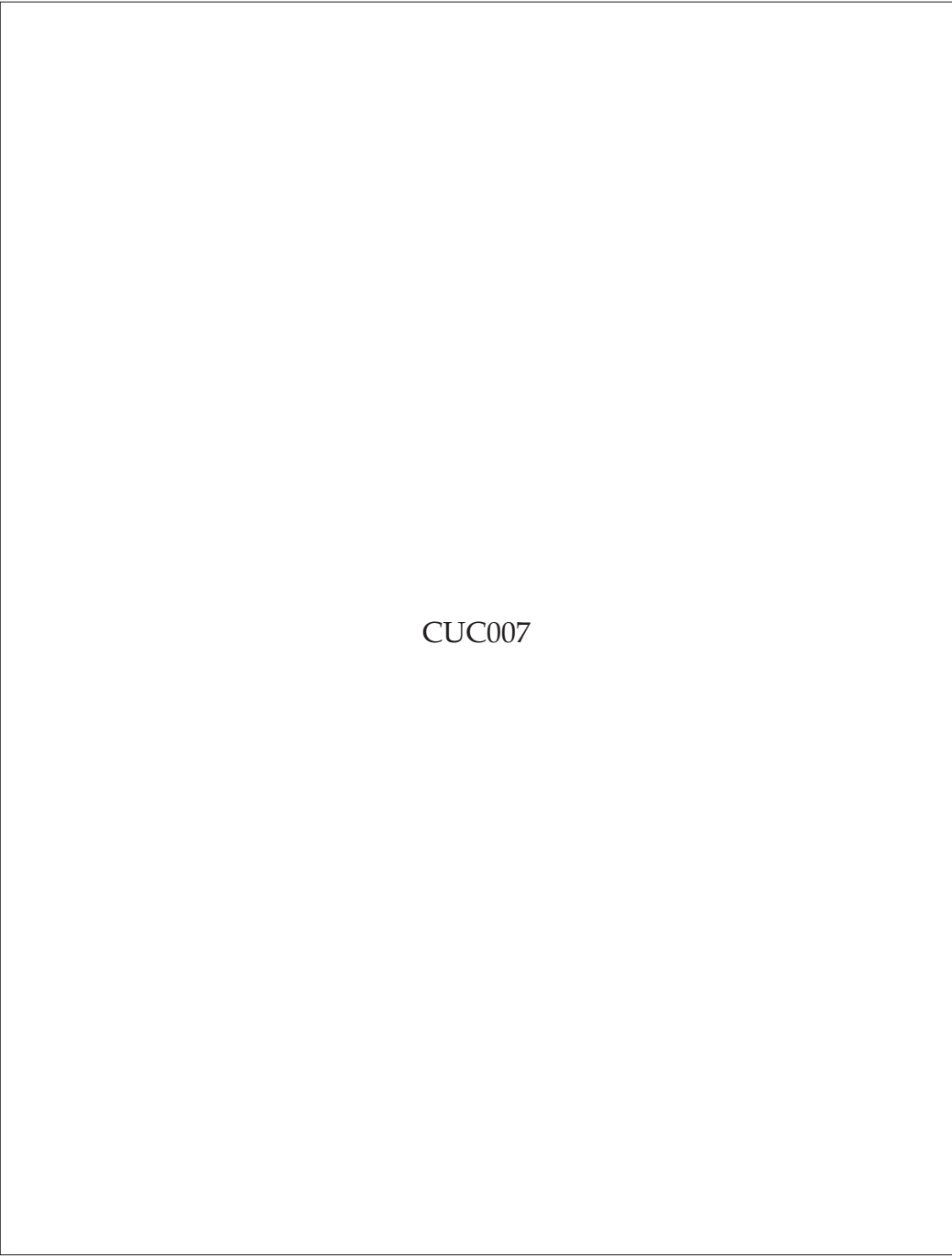
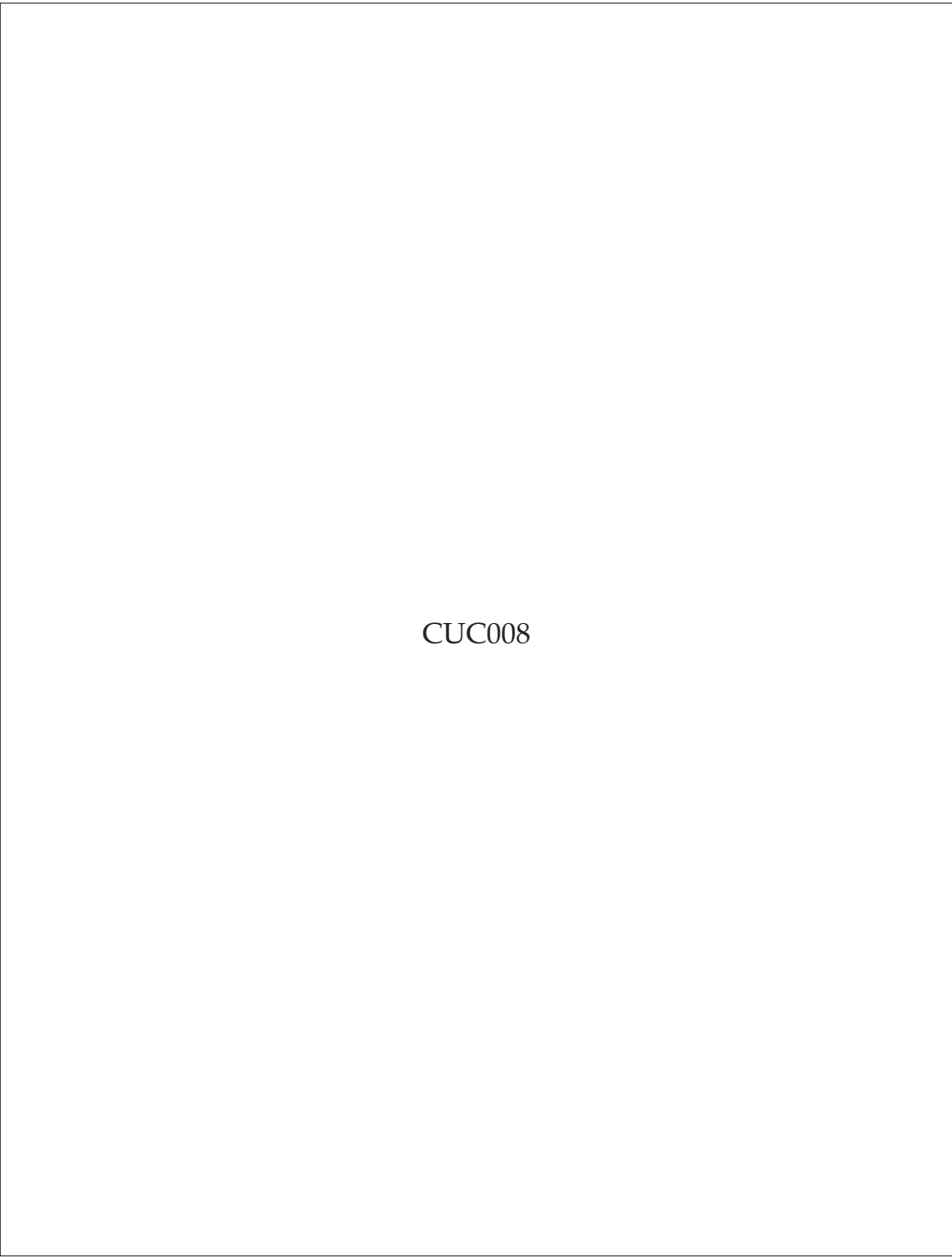


















TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

SPORTS TRANSACTIONS

**MLB**  
HOUSTON ASTROS-Fired Jimmy Williams, manager; Burt Hooton, pitching coach; and Harry Spilman, hitting coach. Named Phil Garner manager, Jim Hickey pitching coach, and Gary Gaetti hitting coach.

**NBA**  
ATLANTA HAWKS-Signed C Jason Collier.  
BOSTON CELTICS-Re-signed C Mark Blount to a six-year contract.  
CHARLOTTE BOBCATS-Signed G Jason Hart and F Tamar Slay.  
DALLAS MAVERICKS-Re-signed G Marquis Daniels to a five-year contract with a team option.  
DETROIT PISTONS-Signed F Antonio McDyess to a four-year contract with a team option and G-F Carlos Delfino to a three-year contract with a team option.  
GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS-Re-signed C Adonal Foyle to a six-year contract.  
LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS-Traded F-C Melvin Ely and G Eddie House to Charlotte for 2005 and 2006 second-round draft picks.  
LOS ANGELES LAKERS-Traded C Shaquille O'Neal to Miami for F Lamar Odom, F Caron Butler, F-C Brian Grant and a future first-round draft pick.  
MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES-Signed F Brian Cardinal to a six-year contract.  
MILWAUKEE BUCKS-Signed C Etan Thomas to a six-year offer sheet.  
PHILADELPHIA 76ERS-Signed F Brian Skinner to a multiyear contract.  
PHOENIX SUNS-Signed G Quentin Richardson to a six-year offer sheet. Signed G Steve Nash to a six-yr contract.  
SAN ANTONIO SPURS-Re-signed F Bruce Bowen. Signed G Beno Udrih.  
TORONTO RAPTORS-Signed G Rafer Alston to a five-year contract.  
UTAH JAZZ-Signed F Carlos Boozer and C Mehmet Okur to six-year offer sheets. Re-signed G Carlos Arroyo to a four-year contract.

**NFL**  
GREEN BAY PACKERS-Voided the trade of DE Jamal Reynolds to Indianapolis after Reynolds failed his physical and waived him.  
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS-Released S Jason Perry.

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES-Signed G Adrien Clarke to a four-year contract and LB Jeremiah Trotter to a one-year contract.

**Olympics**  
U.S. OLYMPIC MEN'S ROAD CYCLING TEAM-Announced Levi Leipheimer will replace Lance Armstrong.

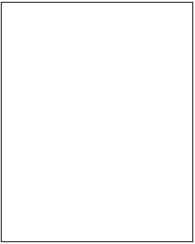
**College**  
AUBURN-Named Casey Dunn assistant baseball coach.  
DARTMOUTH-Named Maribel Sanchez Souther women's cross country coach.  
EVERGREEN STATE-Named Kim Farnsworth athletic trainer.  
HOUSTON-Named John Severance women's tennis coach.  
N.J. CITY-Named Bridgette Quimpo softball coach.  
NORTH DAKOTA STATE-Named Eric Viney women's assistant volleyball coach.  
NORTHWESTERN-Announced men's junior basketball F Bernard Cote will transfer from Kentucky.  
OKLAHOMA-Named Bill Pink director of women's basketball operations.  
PALM BEACH ATLANTIC-Announced the resignation of Chris Bizol, men's and women's tennis coach, to take a position with Texas-Tyler.  
RHODE ISLAND-Announced the resignation of Boe Pearman, women's basketball coach.  
SANTA CLARA-Named M. Felipe Montoro assistant cross country coach and Steve Drake women's assistant basketball coach.  
SETON HALL-Named Gerson Echeverry men's assistant soccer coach.  
SKIDMORE-Named Darren Bennett women's basketball coach.  
ST. FRANCIS, PA.-Named Wylie Crisanti women's lacrosse coach.  
TULSA-Named Christy Connoyer softball coach.  
WRIGHT STATE-Named Rob Cooper baseball coach.

By The Associated Press

LOCAL SCORES

RESTAURANT LEAGUE STANDINGS		
Angel Wings	3	0
Country House	3	1
Jollibee	3	1
Capricciosa	2	1
Keeraku	1	2
LSG Sky Chefs	0	3
El Segundo	0	4





27

Saipan Tribune

# Sports

25

